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## **Participation Now! Citizenship Education and Democracy in Times of Change**

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### **Curriculum and beyond: How schools are coping with participatory challenge?**

**by Anu Toots**

Tallinn University, Institute of politics and governance (Estonia)

Rapid changes in participatory forms and options are often addressed in the context of civil society and social movements. However, despite of impressive increase of non-institutional forms of youth civic participation (mainly due to the Web 2.0) schools have remained the institution where young people spend majority of their time. Therefore one should not leave developments in citizenship teaching and learning in schools without attention. The current paper aims to map some key parameters of current situation and point on latest research findings that question some previous knowledge. The discussion is based on the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS2009) data, by focusing on Baltic Sea and Mediterranean countries.

Firstly, I will outline the political & policy framework for citizenship education in schools. Secondly, I compare teachers' understandings of aims of civic and citizenship education (CCE) and association of these conceptual understandings with their teaching practices. And thirdly, I will ask whether schools are governed democratically or, whether at least premises exist for this?

Formal citizenship education exists today in all European countries and its aims and content are defined by the national curriculum. Broadly, two main approaches of organizing CCE in school can be distinguished. In Central-Europe CCE is typically taught as a cross-curriculum topic, in Eastern Europe and in majority of Mediterranean countries it has a separate subject status (Eurydice, 2012). However, there is no strong evidence that one approach is more efficient in educating civic competences and values than another (Schulz et al., 2010).

Introduction of CCE curriculum throughout the European countries has brought to standardisation of teaching, which brings to both positive and negative effects. Besides having their special national focuses, countries share also a common content of CCE that enhances building of European model of citizenship. This European model is based on shared values and common expectations towards citizenship competencies and participation. On the negative side the inclusion of CCE in formal curriculum has made pedagogical approaches and educational content more rigid and resistant to innovations. To change the content or teaching priorities one has to go through all stages of policy making, which more often than not is a very long lasting process. Low innovation capacity of formal policy documents is reflected, for example, in orientation of national curricula towards teaching facts that continuously dominates in all European countries. Analysing participatory opportunities and possibilities to bring about change in school or in community are rarely given a strong emphasis in national curriculum.



Yet, teachers do not take curriculum guidelines for granted. In teachers' understandings active cognitive competences such as critical thinking or conflict resolution are more important than simple knowing of citizen's rights. As table 1 shows, critical thinking is especially strongly valued among Scandinavian teachers. Other countries represented here are geographically and culturally diverse but share a common feature – a relatively recent authoritarian/totalitarian past, which may have affected teachers' conceptions of independent thinking. Unfortunately, educating for participation in school or in community is not seen as a priority of CCE amongst majority of teachers, except Poland.

Table 1. Teachers' ratings of the most important aims of the CCE, % of teachers who named them among top 3 aims. Source: ICCS 2009

Teachers' priorities	Knowing Citizen's rights	Participation in local community	Participation in school life	Critical & independent thinking	Resolving conflicts
Malta	20	18	21	60	32
Cyprus	41	12	18	63	23
Poland	53	<b>38</b>	<b>35</b>	44	36
Estonia	71	12	13	66	71
Sweden	62	2	10	<b>84</b>	30
Finland	37	7	18	<b>81</b>	37
Denmark	32	7	4	<b>89</b>	51
Italy	78	8	11	58	78
Spain	61	3	13	67	57

As further analysis has shown, declared priorities do affect teachers' practices, i.e. prioritised topics are more often taken to the classes (Toots, 2013). Thus, formal civic and citizenship education in schools can be characterized as learning that equips students with cognitive knowledge and skills but failures to provide explicit practical experience of democratic participation.

Does this worrisome situation affect students and teachers engagement in schools? Can the hidden curriculum and school ethos fill the participatory gap caused by the knowledge oriented formal curriculum?

Results of the International ICCS 2009 survey provide some interesting results here. At average 52% of teachers across 38 countries say that most of students express their opinion freely and know how to listen and respect others, 40% of teachers agree that students suggest topics and activities in classes, and 38% note that students negotiate learning objectives. However, regional disparities are remarkable. Firstly, European students are at average less eager to be engaged in organising class activities or debate than their peers in Latin America and Russia. Secondly, in Mediterranean countries students are more active than their peers in Baltic Sea states (Figure 1). Yet, one must bear in mind that this data reflect teacher's view, which can be different from students' opinion. Therefore it is important to compare students' and teachers' data.

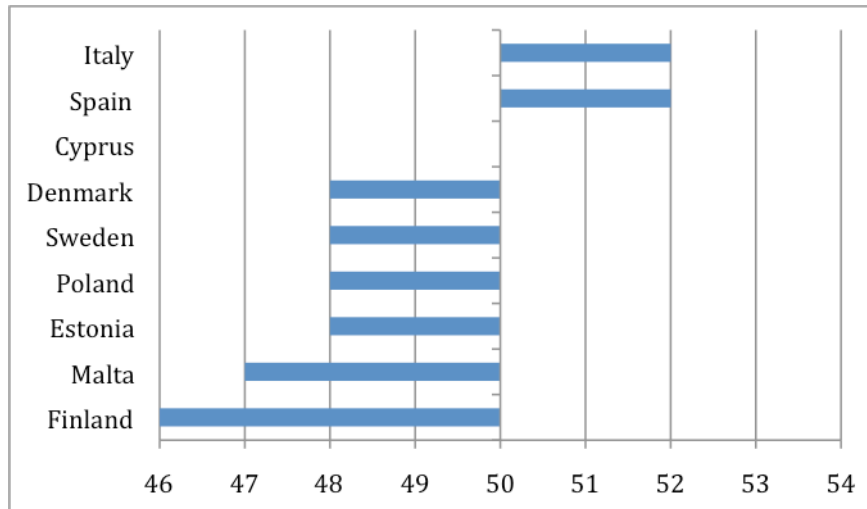


Figure 1. National averages for teachers' report on student participation in class activities; scale with international average set at 50. Source: ICCS 2009

To do so, one can look at the participation of teachers and students outside the classroom in school governance. School can be regarded as a prototype of democratic governance because it has elected student councils, rule of law and challenge to civic participation in order to improve the school life. The ICCS survey provided several relevant items by asking students whether they have participated in music and drama clubs, in debates and decision-making in school, whether they have taken part in elections of class representative or in student self government activities. Teachers were asked to estimate, how many teachers in school co-operate, participate in school development, encourage students' participation, or help solving conflicts. Based on these items two scales, one for students and one for teachers have been constructed and national averages for nine European countries are presented at figure 2. Once again, one can see large variance between countries as well as between students and teachers. However, differently from classroom activism there is no regional pattern. Generally teachers are less active to participate in school activities than students, except Poland, Denmark and Italy. Spain and Cyprus demonstrate largest disparity between students and teachers in terms of school participation – students in these countries are above the international mean, whereas their teachers' are three points below international mean. In some countries (such as Finland and Malta) there is large disparity between teachers' priorities and real participation of students and teachers in school life. This finding suggests that teachers understand the need for change. However, to make the change happen teachers should become a role model for students by demonstrating active engagement in school by themselves.

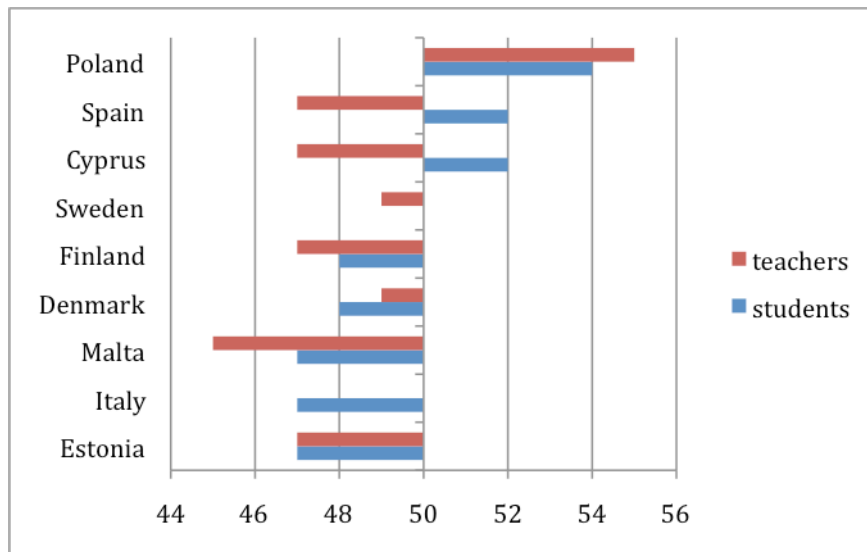


Figure 2. National averages for teachers' and students' report on participation in school governance; scale with international average set at 50. Source: ICCS 2009

In sum, the picture that emerges poses some important questions. Despite of well-established legal framework and substantial tradition of teaching CCE, it provides weak support to develop schools into working model of participatory democracy. Secondly, study findings do not reveal positive association between students' civic knowledge and active participation in classroom or in school governance. Thus, the fundamental question rises whether low citizenship participation of students and teachers within the school can be seen as a problem? If so, what tools and approaches can be used to enhance positive effect of participatory learning on citizenship knowledge?

*References:*

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