

The Impact of Cultural and Citizenship Education on Social Cohesion

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Input

Workshop 6

**What Does Hold Society Together: How Does Education in Human
Rights and the Mediation of Values Influence Social Cohesion?**

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Schools as Places of Civil Enculturation

Today's societies are by nature diverse, and this diversity will only increase in the foreseeable future. At the same time, most political philosophers and theorists of culture insist that a certain core of common values is necessary in order to hold society together. The argument is usually about how big or how small this common core should be, and what kind of values should be included in it. In the European Union and among the Council of Europe member states, a long list of agreements and recommendations suggests that participation, equality and human rights are at the core of common values, but ways in which these values are transmitted through education (and how successfully they are transmitted) differ considerably, depending on the context.

Schools play a crucial role in the transmission of civil values. Researchers have called this process 'civil enculturation'. Gerd Baumann describes civil enculturation as 'the process by which an individual acquires the mental representations (beliefs, knowledge and so forth) and patterns of behaviour required to function as a member of a (civil) culture' (Schiffauer, Baumann, Kastroyano and Vertovec (2004). Civil Enculturation. Nation-State, School and Ethnic Difference in the Netherlands, Britain, Germany and France)

In a diverse society, such beliefs and patterns of behaviour include the ability to coexist and cooperate with others, while respecting differences.

The necessity to foster skills that are essential for co-existing with others in a democratic society is stated in Council of Europe documents related to Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC). Appendix to Recommendation Rec(2002)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states proposes that education for democratic citizenship means, among other things: encouraging multidisciplinary approaches and actions combining civic and political education with the teaching of history, philosophy, religions, languages, social sciences paying particular attention to the acquisition of those attitudes as being necessary for life in multicultural societies respecting differences and being concerned with their environment, which is undergoing rapid and often unforeseeable changes.

To that end, it would be appropriate to implement educational approaches and teaching methods which aim at learning how to live together in a democratic society, and at combating aggressive nationalism, racism and intolerance as well as eliminating violence and extremist thinking and behaviour.

This implies, among other things, that the curriculum related to history, philosophy, religions, languages, social sciences, etc. is seen as an essential part of civil acculturation, even if it does not explicitly touch on issues of citizenship and political participation. Attitudes towards others, be they individuals or groups marked out by some social, ethnic, cultural or religious features, are shaped by the curriculum in these subjects, but also by the so-called 'hidden curriculum' or the process by which teachers enhance or 'correct' official curricula in order to transmit their own values.

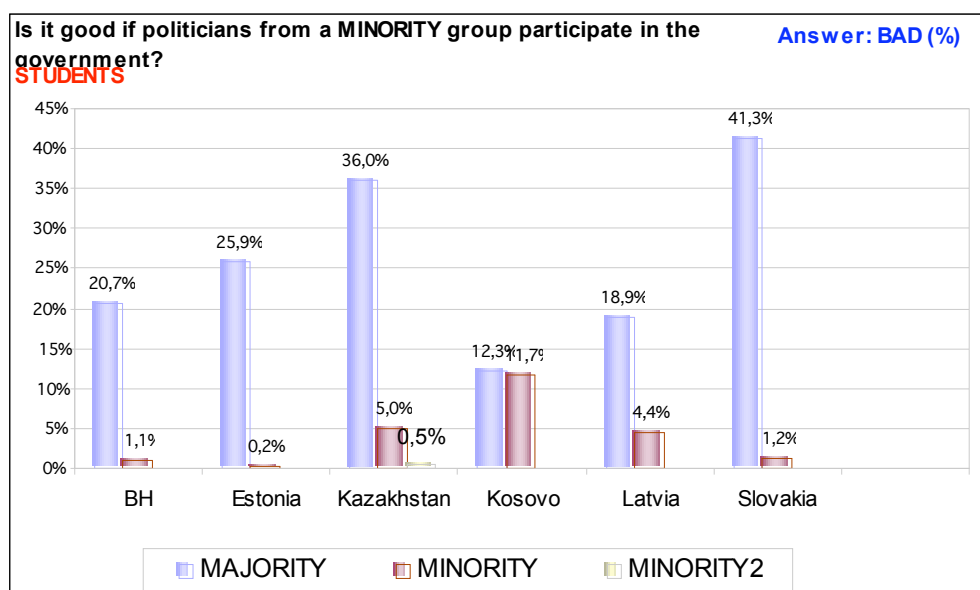
The above mentioned observation is not as trivial as it may seem, as it implies that a large body of curricula and textbooks in countries that have formally subscribed to these principles would have to be revised in order to ascertain their adherence to 'attitudes necessary for life in multicultural societies'. This is not always the case even in member countries of the Council of Europe, and there are cases when the official curriculum or the 'hidden curriculum' promoted by teachers (or both) reproduce mistrust towards groups in society viewed as 'alien' or 'other', including other ethnic groups in the same country.

Recently, the political debate in the EU has also touched upon related issues. Some comments on the Green Paper "Migration & Mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems", adopted on 3 July 2008, have expressed concern about the effects of school segregation or self-segregation on the outcomes of education for students with a migration background in West European countries. This includes social and political outcomes. There is a need for comparative international studies on the outcomes of segregation at schools on the civil attitudes of students.

The Network of Education Policy Centers has conducted a comparative international study of this sort in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where self-segregation is a feature of schools for traditional minorities rather than for migrants. Our study included 8 countries where separate schools for major ethnic/ linguistic groups are supported by the state: four EU member states (Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Romania), two countries in South-East Europe (Bosnia and Hercegovina, Kosovo) and two countries in Central Asia (Kazakhstan and Tajikistan). In seven of these countries, a quantitative survey including representative samples of students at majority and minority schools and teachers at the same schools was conducted.

All of these countries were part of the Eastern Block, and they have experienced considerable pressure to democratize their education systems, albeit to different degrees. Each of the countries in the study has a significant number of separate schools for ethnic minorities. This is usually viewed as a manifestation of a democratic policy, as respecting the cultural rights of minorities.

The study tested to which extent civil values (attitude towards participation and protest, attitude towards diversity, attitude towards gender equality) differ between two separate types of schools in each country. The findings show there are significant differences between the civil attitudes of minority and majority school students in almost every country included in the study. This is not a problem per se, but it becomes a problem when a substantial part of students at majority schools are distrustful towards the political participation of minorities (see the chart).



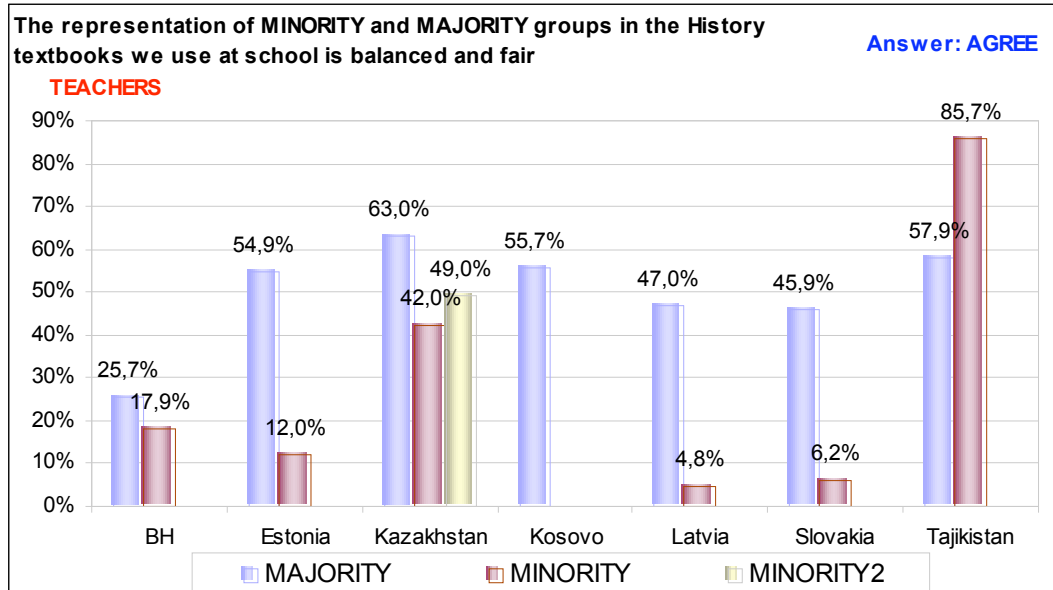
Differences of civil attitudes also become a problem if the confidence of minority students (and teachers) in the efficiency of their own civil participation is much lower than that of their peers at majority schools, which is the case in Estonia and Latvia (see table below).

Statement	'Russian school', Estonia		'Estonian' school		'Russian' school, Latvia		'Latvian' school	
	teacher	student	teacher	student	teacher	student	teacher	student
If the government accepts an unfair law, it is right to protest against it	75	76.6	91.7	89.1	85.7	83.2	85.8	87.8
My participation will not change anything in government policies	65	51.8	30	28	50.8	50.5	29.5	32

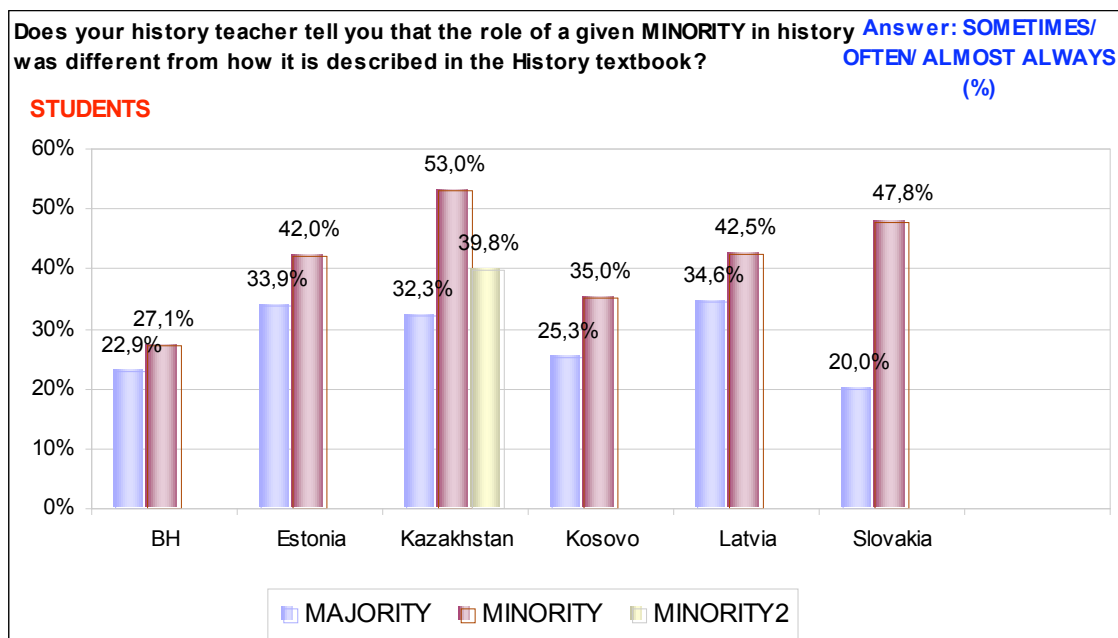
The cause for this sense of disenfranchisement possibly lies outside school, with the power relations between ethnic groups in society (statistical analysis shows lack of direct causality between teachers' and students' answers at each school). Nevertheless, school could become a place which positively compensates the lack of trust between groups in society – but this is not the case with the minority schools in question.

Another alarming tendency is the perceived unfairness of the official curriculum towards minority groups. In all of the countries covered by the survey, a substantial percentage of teachers and students at minority schools perceive elements of ethnic prejudice in the curriculum. Minority school teachers much more often than majority school teachers feel dissatisfaction with the way major ethnic groups are represented in the textbooks and official curricula (in Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia, more than 50% of teachers at minority schools state that they notice the presence of ethnic stereotypes in curricula).

History curriculum, in particular, is a battlefield of ethnic political claims. Minority school teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia do not think that the respective national history curriculum is fair towards ethnic groups, and in Bosnia also the Bosniak majority teachers think so. Minority and majority students have fundamentally different views at the same history issues in Estonia and Latvia, where history controversies are particularly sharp.



In other words, minority school teachers and students often do not feel that the national school system with its curriculum is fair towards their group. To compensate, minority school teachers implement their own 'hidden curriculum': they correct the message of history textbooks by adding their own interpretations, or they use textbooks from other countries (both is sometimes done also by teachers at majority schools, but more seldomly).



Both teachers and students at minority schools strongly support the preservation of the system of separate schooling for majority and minority. They also believe that if minority students went to majority schools, they would lose their ethnic/ cultural identity.

The results of this study show that if the ethnically divided school system mirrors an ethnic division of a society which is either asymmetric in terms of power relations (Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia) or recovering from a violent conflict (BH, Kosovo), minority teachers and students see the reinforcement of their ethnic identities as a priority in education, to be rated above civil participation in a political community which does not give them a sense of empowerment.

The realities of the civil enculturation of future citizens at ethnically separate schools differ widely from the principles espoused by the Council of Europe in its policies on Education for Democratic Citizenship. EDC emphasizes that the existence of inequalities within or between societies obstructs effective citizenship. However, there is a need to do more work with member states to adopt special measures to promote education policies emphasizing equal participation and interethnic trust.

There is an urgent need to address the issue of ethnic prejudices in national curricula and to urge education policy makers to adopt a more open and democratic approach to curriculum development (including history curriculum development). A curriculum that affirms students' identities is empowering for minority students. This affirmation of student identity explicitly challenges coercive power relations in overall society. There are many examples of what this means (Cummins (2001) – Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society).

One of the strategic directions to ensure a more socially cohesive curriculum that reflects also minority points of view is the participatory curriculum development that involves teachers from different ethnic/linguistic groups to create curricula that build bridges, not walls between majority and minority, or between various ethnic groups in society.

A viable option in many countries to ensure that curricula and schools really promote 'learning to live together in a democratic society' is teachers, education policy experts and civil society activists conducting their own monitoring of curriculum policies.

At the same time, there is a need for debate on school segregation to span the East-West divide. Students whole communities will only benefit if discussing best practices and policy solutions to counter the negative effects of segregation becomes a common debate in all of Europe and to some extent in neighbouring countries, because the goal is essentially the same – to maintain school as a space where common democratic culture in society is fostered.