5. THE PARADOXICAL SITUATION OF CIVIC EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS: UBIQUITOUS AND YET ELUSIVE

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INTRODUCTION

If schools did not exist, civic education would still take place. Young people would grow up and learn how to become citizens or political subjects. Thus, we could talk about whether they are active or inactive, informed or uninformed, and supportive or not of the political system and its practices. Schools, however, do exist and are so much a part of contemporary society that it is difficult, even impossible, to imagine civic education being totally excluded from them. Moreover, as long as parts of the political system aspire to foster active, informed and supportive citizens, schools will be considered a possible means to this end. To date, however, their success in this respect has been mixed.

THE PERCEIVED NEED FOR REFORM OF CIVIC EDUCATION

The case studies from the IEA Civic Education Study show that in many ways the current relationship between schooling and civic education is highly problematical.1 This situation is aptly illustrated by the Israeli case study, which
concludes with the following harsh assessment of the state of civic education in the country:

Citizenship education within a polarized society, where little consensus exists over the very essence of collective identities, is almost an impossible task ... The formal curriculum seems to offer unsystematic and sporadic treatment of citizenship education. Civics as a school subject is marginal, and many students encounter it for the first time only in the last grades of high school. Similarly, only a few students are exposed to the social sciences, history, literature and language, as well as the study of the Bible, geography and other school subjects that offer opportunities to discuss issues and concepts, are relevant for citizenship education. In many instances, however, textbooks portray stereotypical images of Arabs and neglect the rich cultural traditions of many Jewish and non-Jewish communities which reside in Israel (Ichilov, 1999, p. 390).

This conclusion goes on to say that, even though there are many programs and materials for supplementary activities, the extent to which students engage in extracurricular activities related to civic education is unknown. Student government, for its part, has a mixed record, engaging some students and failing to attract the participation of others.

Other case studies draw similar conclusions. They reveal that civic education is widely perceived as a problem area in countries that are otherwise different from one another. For example, in the Canadian case, the authors declare that there is a lack of clarity concerning precisely what is expected of the school system in terms of civic education; there is a lack of professional knowledge concerning how the knowledge, skills and dispositions of citizenship are learned; and even less about how they might be taught; and, based on the foregoing, there is a lack of surety about how to monitor progress (Sears et al., 1999, p. 130).

Of particular concern is the fact that, in country after country, surveys and other sources of information show young people to be ignorant of and alienated from political institutions and practices. This leaves educators with a predicament. The more students are alienated, the more difficult it is to find ways to interest them in civic education. This alienation is particularly well documented in the Finnish case study, which notes that in a longitudinal study of young people in the 1970s and 1980s more than half of them regarded politics as insignificant, whereas only a third considered it important. A 1993 study of Finnish 16- to 19-year-olds also documented young people’s negative views of politics. Given a word association task, these young people characterized politics as “incomprehensible speech”, “fool play”, “dull” and “plain stupid”. Politicians were characterized as “clowns”, “swindlers” or, for instance, “old, stupid people past 50 making unwise decisions.” Nearly 50% of these young people regarded politics as irrelevant for them (Ahonen & Virta, 1999, pp. 235–236).

In Hungary, a 1994–1995 survey of a representative sample of 18- to 35-year-olds found that 72% of this age group were dissatisfied with the functioning of their democratic institutions. Only 25% of the 25- to 35-year-olds and 15% of the 18- to 24-year-olds expressed interest in politics as compared to 46% of adults overall (Márai, 1999, p. 350).

Similarly, the Belgian report asserts that young people have “a poor knowledge of political doctrines or even about current political events” (Blondin & Schilling, 1999, p. 71), and the German case study reports that German youth have not maintained the interest and involvement in politics that was evident in the 1960s and 1970s (Händle et al., 1999, p. 266). In Italy, studies show not only that students lack confidence in politics and towards political institutions, but also that “the knowledge actually acquired by [them] ... is a long way from what was envisaged in the objectives of schooling” (Losito, 1999, p. 403). And in Australia “the evidence disclosed by research on student learning and specific outcomes suggests that students, in fact, understand little about civics and citizenship” (Print et al., 1999, p. 49).

While young people’s knowledge of politics and political institutions is less than desired in the countries studied, the problem is not that civic education is missing from school. Rather, even where there is no subject-matter whose name calls to mind civics learning, civic education is ubiquitous – potentially everywhere in school – with students learning civic knowledge, dispositions and skills from various courses, extracurricular activities, hidden curricula, peers, and relations between teachers and students more generally. In responding to the perceived need, civic education reform could therefore likewise take many forms. It could involve changes in curricula, examinations, teaching methods, school organization, school-community relations and so on. But although one or more case studies allude to each of these possibilities, the accomplishments documented in Phase 1 of the IEA Civic Education Study are much less extensive. No matter how civic education is defined, the obstacles to reform are formidable.

Civic Education as a Problem of Curriculum Development

The easiest, though by no means risk-free, way for schools to intervene in civic education is through conventional curriculum development, that is, by changing the school syllabi and textbooks that provide an intended curriculum. The authors of the national case studies were asked to say what their countries were doing in this respect. Their answers are revealing.
First, there are countries where civics does not exist as a separate subject, such as Australia, Bulgaria and England. As the English case study illustrates, this omission does not mean that civic education is considered unimportant. To the contrary, it is argued in the English case that making civic education a specific subject matter in the manifest curriculum might distort the larger aims of civic education as embodied in the whole of the educational experience. The author explains:

Though the maintenance of a democratic society is a central aim of education in England, it is not formalised in the curriculum. Rather it remains an intended outcome of the whole educational experience for students offered through many different forms and context, and involving not only schools but also parents and society in general (Kerr, 1999, p. 211).

Indeed, the history of education for citizenship in England is a curious mixture: noble intentions, which are then turned into general pronouncements, which, in turn, become minimal guidance for schools. The avoidance of any overt official government direction to schools concerning political socialization and citizenship education can almost be seen as a national trait. Such education has long been perceived by educators and politicians as unbecoming, vulgar and "unEnglish" (p. 204).

The English case study further illustrates how such an approach can give to civic education its elusive character of being hard to document conclusively:

The case study findings also highlight, in particular, how little is known about just what emphasis is given to citizenship education in schools and about how it is addressed through the curriculum. They demonstrate how each school has a large degree of autonomy in delivering the non-statutory curriculum framework and in deciding how, where and when the topic domains associated with citizenship education might be included as part of students’ experiences (p. 212).

The case study continues by pointing out that although Education for Citizenship is officially one of five recent cross-curricular themes in England’s national curriculum, only 19% of the schools sampled in a survey for the case study deliver it as a “defined cross-curricular theme” and only 2% offer it as a separate subject (p. 212). Since the case study was done, however, the five cross-curricular themes have been superseded by the revised national curriculum in England, introduced in schools in September 2000. Reversing the long-standing tradition, citizenship will be a new statutory subject in the national curriculum from September 2002 (personal communication from National Research Center).
In Switzerland, where there is no nationwide coordination of the curriculum, civic education is treated in different subjects under different headings. Teachers have substantial freedom to select the content. There are four different main approaches: one is oriented toward social studies and the social sciences; a second emphasizes integrating economics into civic education; a third emphasizes international understanding and related concepts; and the fourth focuses on the links between civic education and active student participation. An example of a course in which many topics pertaining to civic education are dealt with is the subject called Lebenskunde (social studies). These topics include prejudice and discrimination; pluralism and individualism; lifestyle and personality; drugs; conflict and conflict resolution; community obligations; and friendship, love and sex. However, there is no obligation to deal with all these topics, and performance in these classes is not graded. "The disadvantage may be that neither students or teachers take them very seriously" (Reichenbach, 1999, p. 561).

Civic Education in Other Established School Subjects

Civic education in schools is never restricted to courses with a title explicitly referring to civic education as a subject matter. The case studies contain many examples of civic education being taught through history, literature, geography, religion, and so on. However, as in the English case discussed above, in most cases there is little evidence of a coherent plan or scheme underlying these attempts to integrate civic education into diverse subject matters.

It is in these other subject matters that we find much of what is distinctive about a country’s attempt to inculcate the features of its own national identity. The Hungarian case study provides a good example:

In Hungary, forming of the national identity is traditionally the task of history teaching, spread over eight years of education, and teaching of literature over 12 years of education. This is reflected in a 1996 opinion poll among teachers where 65% of the respondents insisted that history and literature should remain compulsory final examination subjects because of the central importance of these two subjects in forming national identity. In the chronologically structured history teaching there is great emphasis on national historic events like movements of independence, wars and peace treaties, changes of the country’s borders resulting from the peace treaties, and local history. Those historical personalities and political groups that stood for the idea of national independence in the history of Hungary receive special attention. In addition to its aesthetic value, literature is important as an historical carrier of the idea of national cohesion. The so-called national writers and poets whose patriotic works kept the national idea alive receive special attention (Mátrai, 1999, p. 355).

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In Greece, according to the case study authors, the courses of history, religion, Modern Greek language and literature, Ancient Greek language and geography all have contents interwoven with political messages and national ideals and have an important role as means of political socialization, given that they refer, either directly or indirectly, to the construction of the historical past, historical continuity of the Greek civilization from ancient to modern times, the preservation of Greek language, national symbols and holidays, the country’s territory and religion as a dominant element of national identity (Makrinioti & Solomon, 1999, p. 292).

Likewise, in Lithuania, the history textbooks include documents which are widely believed to be important for all citizens to know about, for example, the text of the Roman historian Tacitus about our ancestors, the first mention of the name Lithuania, the letters of Grand Duke Gediminas, with the first mention of Vilnius, and the Act of Declaration of Lithuania’s Independence. Another textbook includes readings about national leaders -- kings (Mindaugas), dukes (Gediminas, Vytautas), national liberators (V. Kudirkas), and political figures (A. Snidzovas). They are presented as heroes of history (Zaleskiene, 1999, p. 425).

In Australia, national policy has gone from favoring an integrated cross-curricular approach to "enthusiasm for the school subject history as the optimum vehicle for teaching civics within the existing school curriculum" (Print et al., 1999, p. 44).

It is difficult to know how much impact the presence of civic education in the curriculum of various subject matters has, a point tellingly made in the Finnish case study:

Generally speaking, textbooks for various subjects depict Finns and Finland as a nation that is small, the most Lutheran one in the world, located in the remote north, speaking a hard-to-learn language, and whose history as a state consists of solitary wandering between crises and threatened peace. These components are dispersed across the textbooks, and it is hard to tell how a teenage reader interprets them, and what relevance they have ultimately with respect to identity formation (Ahonen & Virta, 1999, p. 240).

Comparison to Other Subjects

As is evident from all of this, civics is not like other school subjects. It is not as school-based as science or mathematics. It is probably learned mostly outside school, while inside school it does not enjoy the same status as the better-established subjects. As a separate subject it typically has low status and is often taught within very limited blocks of time. And, as we have seen, it may be taught more through other subjects than through courses with labels that
refer explicitly to civic education. More importantly, civic education is little involved in the credentialing and selection process that so largely determines what happens in school and what people think is important about what happens. We do not see in the case studies instances of civic education being sought after by students as an important means of enhancing their occupational prospects and social status. Nor does it generally figure prominently among the high-stakes examinations that students must pass in order to advance to and through the more selective, elite and prestigious parts of educational systems. The point made in the conclusion to the Italian case study applies to other countries as well: "The fact that civic education does not have its own time slot and does not have a separate evaluation of the knowledge gained by students greatly reduces its importance for both teachers and students" (Losito, 1999, p. 399). In fact, in some countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands, explicit civics instruction is seen as most needed and suitable for the less rigorous and demanding tracks and types of schools. In Finland, in a survey of comprehensive school students published in 1993, history and social studies were ranked as 10th in importance and 14th in popularity among 18 subjects (Ahonen & Virta, 1999, p. 235).

This consideration of civic education as a problem of curriculum development leads us to point out that the extent to which schools can expect to control or even intervene in the process of civic learning is different from that for mathematics and science. It is true that for mathematics and science, schools are well advised to take into account the fact that students and others outside schools may hold conceptions of the subject matter that are different from those that inform learning in school. Nevertheless, with mathematics and science, researchers and educators do play an important role in legitimating school knowledge as the correct version of "truth" to be learned. In civic education, researchers and educators have a much more marginal role in which they are forced to take into account the normative "facts" of political institutions and processes, with all their embodied ideologies and biases. The freedom of researchers and educators to impose a certain version of truth as the intended curriculum of schools is limited and often contentious. Instead, as we see in the English, Dutch and United States examples, politicians and legislators can more easily play a dominant role in determining the content of school learning in civics.

The different subject matters can even become vehicles for competing visions of civic education. In the United States, for example, history competes with social studies (although one needs to keep in mind that each of these fields is open to dispute from within as well). An excerpt from a book by Nash et al. (1997) on conflicts over the teaching of history in the United States illustrates this competition:

Historians worried ... that too many social studies educators thought history was mainly useful for laying out "background" for the study of up-to-the-minute national and international events. On this issue, many historians tended to line up with moderately conservative critics, sharing their view that the rich four-year history curriculum of the early twentieth century had been a good idea, that history should be taught chronologically, and that children might better devote less time to solving political crises abroad or social problems at home and more to gaining the historical perspectives and understandings they would need to address public problems in adulthood, when those issues would for the most part have changed (p. 108).

Civic Education as a Problem of Pedagogy and Student Participation

In all of the case studies, civic education is conceived of as more than a process of curriculum development, implementation and assessment. In most, the authors give attention to school initiatives that go beyond the formally established subject-matter curricula. But if civic education is not simply one of the subjects studied in school, what is it? One aspect that the authors frequently mention is the intention to give students the opportunity to participate more actively in the selection of activities, the execution of those activities, and the construction of their own knowledge, either in or outside of formal coursework.

Earlier research on political socialization has shown that children construct their knowledge of political processes somewhat differently from adults (Hess & Torney, 1967). Thus, a case can be made for students to participate more actively in their own learning on the basis not only of general pedagogical principles but also of what is known about young people's political knowledge. In addition, the results of the first IEA Civic Education Study suggested that allowing more freedom for student expression in classrooms was productive in terms of learning. Controlling for other relevant variables, the researchers found that, across countries, the students of teachers who encouraged independence of opinion in their classrooms tended to receive the higher scores on the civics cognitive tests (Torney et al., 1975). Nevertheless, the current case studies show that the pedagogical issues in civic education are far from resolved, and it is not clear whether giving students more participatory opportunities in civic education has made as much progress as many had hoped.

One obstacle to free expression of student or teacher opinions is the pressure to avoid too much political controversy. Indoctrination is largely out of favor in the countries represented in the case studies, but so is complete freedom of expression. In some countries this takes the form of a prohibition on taking political sides in school. Hong Kong has been a good example of this point of view. Before 1990, in a regulation introduced to limit the spread of nationalist Chinese ideology in school, the following was mandated:
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rule: teacher’s talk takes up about 70% of the lesson time” (Ahonen & Virta, 1999, p. 250). Similarly, in Germany, although empirical studies show that both teachers and students prefer student-oriented, problem-centered civic education, German secondary schools remain dominated by teacher-centered instruction (Händle et al., 1999, p. 261).

In contrast, the authors of the Australian case study claim that the situation in their schools is different: “Interactive teaching, where the teacher provides information and discusses issues with students in a structured classroom environment, is the most favored teaching strategy. There is ample anecdotal evidence that classroom discussion of student opinions is common” (Print et al., 1999, pp. 48–49). The case study contains an impressive set of activities dealing with civics and citizenship:

Students may visit or be visited by elected officials; observe question time in Parliament; design and produce their own election material; stand as candidates and vote for representatives on a student representative council; set up and run class parliaments; develop and observe class codes of conduct; use databases to research information on Australian institutions and practices; follow the working through of a contemporary political issue involving their own community; express opinions in letters to the editor; create and circulate petitions; take part in panel discussions; review current affairs broadcasts and discuss issues and views expressed; make flow charts to show elements of a political system and how processes connect these elements; debate ideas on rights and responsibilities of citizens; contribute their labour and ideas to a community project; and research and report on the origins of selected aspects of Australian democracy (Print et al., 1999, p. 49).

The authors admit that the frequency and effectiveness of these activities vary considerably within Australia. In other countries where the case studies relied on quantitative studies for estimating the frequency of a given activity, the evidence is not always consistent and conclusive. In the United States, for example, all students in the focus groups convened for the case study said that they had participated in mock presidential elections in 1996. However, the case study is also careful to note that in an earlier national assessment sample in 1988, 52% of 12th graders said they had never participated in mock elections (Hahn, 1999, pp. 593–594). Was this difference due to a real increase in mock elections, or a non-representative sample of focus group students, or the timing of these surveys in relation to major United States elections? Whatever the answer, it is important to note that the qualitative nature of the national case studies does not permit precise comparison of countries according to the prevalence of these or other activities. This more exact cross-national analysis requires examining Phase 2 of the Civic Education Study (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

Since participatory opportunities in formal coursework remain limited in many countries, special student projects and extracurricular activities offer the
most extensive opportunities for participatory forms of civic education in school. As the German case study notes, "student-oriented and open teaching styles are more likely to be practiced in extra-curricular activities that are not compulsory, as well as in project days and project weeks" (Handle et al., 1999, p. 261). And in the German case study survey of experts, "project work and opening the schools took priority over both increasing the number of hours in the subject of civic education and easing the amount of classroom instruction in favor of additional activities" (p. 278). The case study reports on the results of a 1995 competition in which 283 projects were submitted from all types of schools and all German states. Some projects originated in civic education lessons, some in extra curricular activities and others in project weeks.

Some of the student projects mentioned in the German case study focus specifically on expanding the activities of student government while other projects encourage all students to participate in the school in order to represent student interests. To that end, projects have included school assemblies to discuss problems, as well as peer mediation and conflict resolution. Projects also offer students opportunities for social action in their immediate community. In one such instance, students investigated the "free-time interests of their peers and the situation of playgrounds and youth homes" (p. 268). They documented their findings and then represented their peers' interests to the community government. The National Socialist period and the Holocaust were central topics in many of the student projects. This was especially so in 1995, which marked the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II (p. 271). Student projects also reflect an interest in international relations by encouraging partnerships between schools in different countries (p. 273), in intercultural understanding by fostering awareness within their schools (p. 275), and an interest in ecological issues and problems (p. 276). In sum, the student projects cover a wide range of topic areas and often serve to reduce the gap between the official goals of civic education and the realization of those goals in the school. Unfortunately, not all students have the opportunity to participate in such projects because of time constraints in schools, which generally operate on half-day sessions, and because of the extra work that such projects make for teachers (personal communication from National Research Center).

In the Belgian case study, one organization, the Fondation Roi Baudouin, is mentioned for its role in fostering student participation through partnerships with agencies outside the school. In one of the projects described as exemplary, secondary school students suggested solutions to local problems, such as insecurity in the school neighborhood, unsafe highways, inadequate traffic signs and deteriorating housing. They met with local officials and organized educational activities to deal with these problems (Blondin & Schillings, 1999, pp. 79–80). In Israel, 11th graders are required to dedicate time to community work with, for example, children or older people (Ichilov, 1999, p. 380).

Although the English case study laments the lack of research evidence on extracurricular activities in English schools, it, more than the other case studies, provides some empirical information on the nature of these activities. A 1990 survey of secondary schools found that the most common extracurricular activities were community activity or service (found in 90% of the schools) and school councils (60% of the schools). A survey carried out for the case study itself found that among 11- to 14-year-olds the most common activities were charity fund-raising (87% of schools), school councils (67%), clubs and societies (57%), environmental projects (50%) and community activities (49%) (Kerr, 1999, pp. 213–214).

Civic Education as a Problem of School Organization and Student Rights

There is wide agreement in the case studies that students learn about democracy by experiencing democracy and that ideally schools should be models of democracy. The author of the Lithuanian case study raises the following questions: "Does the teacher use democratic methods in teaching? Are students encouraged to be responsible for the school community? Does self-government exist in the school? Do students and parents take an active role in establishing curriculum priorities? Does the school have close relations to local governmental institutions?" She goes on to note that while some of these features have been mandated, in most cases they have not been put into practice (Zaleskienė, 1999, p. 422).

More generally among the case studies, there is little evidence that this radical challenge to school organization has really taken hold, perhaps because it runs up against a central problem of any democracy: How much freedom and autonomy can citizens enjoy without undermining the social order and collective aims that have brought them together? What is pertinent here are two facts. First, young people in contemporary states are obligated to be in school whether they want to or not (that is, without voluntarily committing themselves to the collective aims of schooling). Second, they have not yet reached the age at which they attain the citizenship rights accorded by their particular nation state. As such, educators have been little encouraged to give students extensive rights to govern themselves. If it is difficult to transform classrooms into places that welcome participation, it is proving even more difficult to transform schools to make them democratic from the point of view of students (or even teachers for that matter).
countries there is provision for student councils at different levels. However, the Italian case study declares that "it is widely believed at this time that these forms of participation are quite unsatisfactory" (Losito, 1999, p. 404). Similarly, the Cypriot case study, based on interviews with ministry personnel and students, concludes that "student councils are not realizing their full potential at this time ... [and that] students believe that their opinions are not taken under serious consideration at any level" (Papanastasiou & Kousselini-Ioannidou, 1999, p. 166). The Colombian (Rueda, 1999, p. 150) and German case studies (Händle, 1999, p. 278) offer similar conclusions.

Nevertheless, in contrast to countries where politics are banned from schools, Italian schools guarantee students the right to organize political debates and demonstrations at schools. In addition, student participation in external demonstrations is largely tolerated (Losito, 1999, p. 412). The Cypriot report also emphasizes these sorts of student rights:

The students, especially those of the lyceum, take part when they wish in political demonstrations or events. They do this in association with adults (outside school time). According to ... [informants], they are very well informed about political and other matters. Discussions on politics are allowed in school, and the general impression is that projected is that active participation in common affairs is an obligation of the citizen and that the government is responsive to the wishes and claims of its citizens. Moreover, students in Cyprus are members of the youth organizations of political parties, which are special sections of political parties dealing with issues that concern the young (Papanastasiou & Kousselini-Ioannidou, 1999, p. 167).

In contrast, in the Czech Republic, a 1995 inspection of 362 basic schools found that official school rules in 66% of the schools did not mention student rights (Vělová & Kalous, 1999, p. 196). The Romanian case study concludes that "student participation in decisions regarding their personal, school and social situations is not encouraged. There is no student representation on the school governing boards; there are only a few student associations, and they play no part in decision-making or even consultations" (Bunescu et al., 1999, p. 518). The Hungarian case study agrees: "The main problem in Hungary is that the school and the community do not provide opportunities for students to practice their democratic rights. ... Students are not urged to play an active role in the political life of the school" (Mátra, 1999, p. 352).

In the United States, according to the case study, whether or not students participate in classroom discussions, extra-curricular activities, or even student government varies substantially from school to school, and even among classrooms within the same school (Hahn, 1999, p. 594).
Given that much of civic education admittedly takes place outside schools and that school learning is mediated and ultimately limited by what happens outside school, the school’s response to these outside influences is critical. Much could be written on this topic. However, for the sake of brevity, we illustrate this aspect of the school’s role in civic education by discussing an example of two common types of response. One is to declare a certain aspect of civic education beyond the purview of the school, leaving it to the family and other institutions. A prime example of this is religion. In countries with established religions, religion can be very much a part of the school’s role in civic education, but in other countries whose political institutions and norms preclude government support of religion, it can be excluded from such a role within the public school. Among the case study countries, the United States and Belgium are good examples of this situation.

Religion as an Exclusion Response

Religion in such instances is often assimilated into other expressions of partisanship on the part of teachers and other school authorities and therefore banned. The Belgian case study quotes from an official decree in its interpretation of the ideological neutrality required of all schools organized by the French community. The decree stipulates that:

[T]eaching staff teach the students to recognize the plurality of values which constitute contemporary humanism. . . . They deal with political, philosophical and doctrinal roots of events and point out diverse motivations. They deal with questions about beliefs, political or philosophical convictions, and religious opinions, using words that cannot offend the opinions and feelings of any of the students. When in front of students, they refrain from any partisan attitude or speech on ideological, moral or social problems which are topical issues of the day and divide public opinion; also they refuse to favor a philosophical or political system, whatever this might be (Blondin & Schillings, 1999, pp. 64–65).

But this stipulation, strictly speaking, applies to only one type of relatively rare public school. Moreover, in these schools, each student not yet 18 years old takes an ethics course or a course in one of five recognized religions. In such religion courses, positions may be taken in favor of a particular religion, but other religions or positions cannot be disparaged (personal communication from National Research Center).

This sort of general policy favoring choice, balance and respect for all religious and non-religious viewpoints does not settle once and for all issues of the place of religion in school. In Belgium the controversy over the wearing of the Islamic shawl (chador) by girls in school is a case in point. Is this to be tolerated as a way of recognizing and encouraging diversity or is it an intrusion on the neutrality of the school? According to one authority quoted by the case study, “some are of the opinion that abandoning the chador is an important step forward in the integration process. To the contrary, others consider the continued use of the shawl as indicative of the success of that process” (Blondin & Schillings, 1999, p. 73). The case study cites the instance of a few female students who were dismissed from school because they insisted on wearing their shawls. Their parents filed suit against the school.

In the United States, students cannot be required to study religion in public schools. In fact, the teaching of a particular faith is banned from public schools because of the country’s constitutionally mandated separation of church and state. Public schools use a secular approach when discussing religion whereas parochial and private schools often explicitly teach religious values. For the most part, young people are taught religion by their families and formal religious organizations. However, students in public schools are expected to learn that the United States Constitution guarantees “freedom of expression” of religion as well as a “wall of separation between church and state”. Students also learn (as early as elementary school) that the first immigrants came to the United States seeking religious freedom, and that religious freedom continues to this day to be an important reason for immigration. In addition, students learn, from both inside and outside school, that religion plays an important role in American society and politics.

As the American case study author points out, school teachers and administrators are quite sensitive about the separation between religion and government and ordinarily try to avoid any conflict in this area. There is nevertheless a continuing controversy among the American public. This centers on the concern that the absence of religious education in the schools may be contributing not only to the perceived moral decline in American society but also to some educators shying away from teaching about the role that religion plays in history and society. Disputes over religious expression at school functions such as athletic events, graduation ceremonies and school assemblies also continue to erupt.2

Media Education as an Inclusion Response

Another common strategy for dealing with outside influences is to try to use the school to educate the young about the influence. This is illustrated in much
of what the case studies say about what should be done in relation to the media, but here again practice lags behind aspiration. Although, in most countries, 14-year-old students are avid consumers of the media, and educators recognize the importance of media education, the extent to which schools effectively prepare students to analyze and interpret media messages varies. In Bulgaria, the case study authors note that while political messages are prevalent on radio, television and in the press, the curriculum and textbooks “do not address the role of the mass media in a systematic way” (Balkansky et al., 1999, p. 100). They further argue that the goals of the school and the mass media are often in conflict. Thus, while schools attempt to present civic education in a politically neutral fashion, the mass media tend to be politically confrontational. Similarly, textbook analyses in Hungary found no mention of the mass media in textbooks aimed at 14-year-old students (Mátrai, 1999, pp. 352–353). In Hong Kong, nearly all of the informants interviewed for the case study saw the mass media as important to society and to civic education, but at the same time many were also critical of the media. In practice, mass media are mentioned as a topic area in many of the Hong Kong syllabi of the formal curriculum. However, textbook analyses indicate that only 33.3% of the textbooks under review covered this topic (Lee, 1999, pp. 332–334).

Colombia has a set of explicit official expectations related to students’ understanding of the mass media and the media’s role in the political process. Among other skills, officials believe that students should be taught to distinguish between fact and opinion, and should be critical when analyzing information (Rueda, 1999, p. 147). However, the author acknowledges that there is a gap between the country’s expectations and the actual implementation of curricular topics concerning “new socialization agents, such as mass media” (p. 149). Like Colombia, Finland also asserts through its case study that media education is an integral part of civic education. The aim of media education in Finnish schools is to teach students to be “critical media consumers” (Aholen & Virta, 1999, p. 248). Here, media education is taught in mother tongue as well as history and social studies. Yet, as in Colombia, the Finnish authors speak of a gap between the “ideals and practice of media education” (p. 248). Thus, while Finnish students may be frequent newspaper readers, it appears that they do not use newspapers to stay as informed about political news as their teachers might want. Rather, the most popular sections of the newspaper among young readers were found to be comics, sports, and the television and radio sections. In addition, while the schools place an emphasis on the print media, adolescents often prefer other media, most notably television (p. 248).

Civic Education as a Problem of Systemic Reform

If one puts all these problems of civic education together, the need for systemic reform becomes apparent. In recent years it has been fashionable to discuss and attempt to carry out the sort of systemic or comprehensive reform whereby coherent changes are made in interrelated parts of educational systems. In such cases, attention is given not only to those aspects of curriculum development and assessment that can be more readily reformed, but also to matters of teacher development and even the very organization of the school.

If any area were seen to be in need of such reform, then it is fair to suppose it would be civic education, for this is an area that many commentators assert is vitally important – even indispensable. Moreover, it is woven into diverse subject matters and has extracurricular and out-of-school as well as formal curricular ramifications. For example, if we really wanted to make schools models of democracy, we would have to ensure that student government is a major component of such a reform policy. We would also have to ascertain the reform’s success by assessing what students learn from participating in or observing the activities of student government.

When compared with systemic reform in civic education, systemic reform in science or mathematics education can be seen as relatively limited in scope since it is more readily confined to the formal curricular, pedagogical and assessment functions of educational systems. Systemic reform in the science and mathematics domains might be more properly termed subsystem reform because, unlike effective civic education reform, it need not be so concerned with school governance, student rights, extracurricular activities and out-of-school influences.

Unfortunately, we are unable to name any countries that have been able to put such an ambitious and comprehensive agenda effectively into practice. Often, such agendas are linked to movements for decentralization and privatization of schooling, strategies that are thought to make experimentation and reform more likely. But it is not yet clear that decentralization and privatization will be effective in leading to widespread change, public accountability and adherence to standards of best practice, especially in such difficult and contentious areas as civic education.

The two countries in the case studies whose holistic approach to civic education comes closest to approximating a plan for systemic reform are Portugal and Colombia. In Portugal the basic legislation declares that civic education is a central aim of schooling. Accordingly, the Minister of Education decreed in 1989 that “personal and social education” (PSE) during primary and secondary education should be:
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Most Neglected Areas

Of all the areas needed for systemic reform, two that have been particularly neglected are assessment and teacher preparation. In the case of teacher preparation suffice it to say that the gaps are well analyzed in Chapter 3 of this current volume.

The neglect of assessment is also well illustrated in the case studies. In none of the case study countries does there seem to be a high-stakes examination on civic education that all or even most secondary school students must pass. In some cases, as we have seen, this may be because civic education is spread throughout much of the curriculum, making it difficult to assess as a discrete subject.

In Russia, before 1990, all school graduates had to pass examinations in social studies, and the fact that this is no longer required, according to the case study, has undermined the teaching and learning of this subject (Bogolubov et al., 1999, p. 527). In the Netherlands, a study of the society course compared the impact of the more intensive examination-oriented version of the course with the same course without examination. It was found that the examination-oriented course was associated with more political interest/involvement and less political cynicism, but not with any change in political tolerance (Dekker, 1999, p. 445).

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE THREE DOMAINS

Based on the input of the national case study authors, as well as on an independent examination of the case study data, three core domains were chosen for this cross-national research: (1) democracy; (2) national identity; and (3) social cohesion and diversity. In each of the three domains, the results of civic education reform on schooling as viewed through the case studies are so far quite limited.

Democracy

One theme emerging from the case studies in relation to the domain of democracy is that civics-related knowledge is considered necessary, but not sufficient, for learning and for becoming a competent democratic citizen. In other words, to be effective, civic education must deal not only with knowledge, but also with attitudes, dispositions and behavior. However, due to the limitations brought about by viewing civic education primarily as a school subject matter (which is a problem of curriculum development), there is little evidence that schools are successful in helping students acquire the attitudes, dispositions and
behaviors needed for democratic societies. Most of the case studies give far more attention to textbooks and other aspects of curriculum reform than to what it would take to make schools models of democracy that would give students the experience of democratic decision-making. It is relatively easy for policymakers to put in place new textbooks, but hard for schools to change attitudes and behaviors (whether of teachers and students) concerning democracy. Moreover, as the Finnish case study authors note, what is written about democracy in syllabi, curricula or textbooks “does not allow us to draw conclusions about the practice in schools or instruction as experienced by the students” (Ahonen & Virta, 1999, p. 240).

In Finnish schools, as in other countries, knowledge about democracy is understood to be a “fairly unproblematic thing”, that is, most Finnish textbooks are relatively neutral in their treatment of democracy and democratic principles and do not really address controversial issues or social conflicts (Ahonen & Virta, 1999, p. 243). The United States case study author makes a related point when she argues that content about democracy is often presented to the students as “uncontested”, with teachers focusing more on “vocabulary and facts” than on “controversial historical and contemporary issues” (Hahn, 1999, p. 592).

Similarly, in Italy, the case study author argues that while there is explicit and even “constant” reference to democracy in primary as well as lower and upper secondary schools, this does not lead to an “in-depth analysis of the many meanings that the term ‘democracy’ can take on, and indeed has taken on throughout history” (Losito, 1999, p. 402). In fact, as we have already noted, several Italian studies suggest that the knowledge about democracy actually acquired by students is different from that stated within the objectives of the school programs (p. 403). In short, such studies illustrate the fact that, in many instances, teaching about democracy has not been able to incorporate an emphasis on critical thinking, analysis of the issues, or open discussion of controversial issues.

Thus, in Italy, as in other countries, even formal course work tends to be weak in fostering knowledge in this domain, particularly compared to what is expected of students in more high-status subjects. This could be because civics is perceived to be a low-status subject, or because of inadequate teacher training, or the lack of student assessment specific to civics, or a combination of these and other factors.

To provide for what courses have not been able to do, schools in many settings have taken on additional roles or functions, with students participating in a broad array of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. For example, in Australia, students may learn about the democratic process from participation in “school representative councils” and school parliaments, or from participation in community projects (Print et al., 1999, p. 50). Students in the United States have similar opportunities and are able, if interested, to participate in a wide range of activities outside the formal curriculum. For example, many American students participate in student elections (for leadership positions in clubs or student governments) as well as in activities designed by the school specifically for the purpose of developing civic responsibility in young people, such as community service, peer mediation or conflict resolution programs (Hahn, 1999, p. 593).

Across countries, the extent to which the school environment actually models democratic principles or fosters student participation varies significantly, but, on the whole, these opportunities are limited. This has been illustrated in the above section on school organization and student rights. In many instances, the school climate impedes open expression of ideas as well as discussion of controversial issues.

In conclusion, teaching about democracy by allowing debate over controversial issues or by making schools more democratic is difficult because it means taking away some of the power of teachers and administrators and giving students more autonomy and power. But, however difficult this may be, creating opportunities for students to practice democratic skills may very well prove essential to their learning in this area. In too many countries there is a gap between what students are expected to learn about democracy, and what they are actually able to achieve in this area. Phase 2 of the IEA Civic Education Study sheds further light on the distance between expectations and achievement in this domain as well as in the second, and in some ways even more complex, domain of national identity (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

National Identity

Given what we have learned from these case studies, it seems that the role of the school in national identity formation has become more marginal over the years—at least in many countries. In the 19th century and early 20th century, the State’s implantation of mass common schools was a part of nation building in such countries as France and the United States, and in the transformation of Prussia into the German Empire. In France, in particular, it was common to portray public elementary school teachers (instituteurs) as the foot soldiers of the Republic fighting for the minds of the people against the forces perceived by many to be reactionary, namely, the church, monarchists and the aristocracy (Weber, 1976).

Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, indoctrination is challenged and national identity education is perhaps more fragmented and latent as states grapple with how to remain unitary and cohesive, and at the same time confront
issues of multiple identities and multiculturalism. Immigration looms increasingly large, both in countries where it has long played an important role, as well as in countries where it is a newer phenomenon. Immigration, which has always been a major issue in Australia, Canada and the United States, and which has now been so for several decades in various Northern and Western European countries, has recently become much more salient in Southern European countries as well, such as Italy and Greece. As the case studies illustrate, immigration is just one of the diverse issues that influence a country’s notion of national identity and the school’s role in its formation.

Responses to questions about national identity among case study countries are extremely varied and reflect a myriad of national needs, concerns and issues (both historical and contemporary). They range from viewing the promotion of national identity as a key aspect of civic education to seeing it as something to be cautiously treated or even avoided in school. At the extreme, national identity has become a problematical, even negative concept. Because of their histories in the Nazi and Fascist era, Germany and Italy are examples of this avoidance tendency. According to the German case study:

Because of the German crimes committed during the National Socialist period, the concept of nationalism carries negative connotations in Germany. Even concepts such as national identity, national consciousness and national pride are used with reluctance (Händle et al., 1999, p. 260).

Civic education focused on national figures, national holidays and national symbols is little developed in German schools. The national anthem and national flag do not play a role in schools; schools likewise avoid celebrations of national memorial days (p. 270).

Thus, because of its history, national identity is viewed with great ambivalence in Germany. Similar attitudes are evident in the Italian case study. Specifically, the Italian author notes that the schools place little importance on some national symbols such as the “national flag or the portrait of the President of the Republic”, reflecting an unwillingness in the schools “to underline and to encourage feelings and attitudes connected with national identity” (Losito, 1999, p. 406). This unwillingness among Italian schools to foster a national identity may be at least partially explained by the “identification of the idea of “fatherland” and “nation” with the fascist regime ... and the nationalistic use of these words during fascism” (pp. 406-407).

In contrast to the case studies from Germany and Italy, other case studies show less avoidance in this domain, and instead emphasize the transitory, evolving state of national identity. Belgium, Bulgaria, Hong Kong and Russia illustrate this perspective. In Belgium, for example, the case study authors describe the issue of national identity as being “in an evolutionary phase”. They point out that what was once considered national could now be considered European or could “devolve to the communities or to the regions” (Blondin & Schillings, 1999, p. 62). According to the authors, Belgian students are involved in “identity issues at several levels: Belgian, French-speaking, Wallon [or] Brussels citizen and European” (p. 62). And while the case study researchers found “nothing explicit in official curricula that would move a teacher to promote national identity in students”, a study published in 1991 found that despite the federalization process, the national Belgian identity had remained predominant among young people in the French community (p. 75).

The notion of national identity is also evolving in Hong Kong. Before 1997, while still a British colony, the Hong Kong people generally viewed national identity as an issue “best left unmentioned” (Lee, 1999, p. 325). Since Hong Kong’s reintegration into China, the topic of national identity has taken on importance and urgency. As one might expect, however, the issue is a complicated one: students are generally considered weak in this area and textbooks tend to treat the topic in an ambiguous fashion (p. 325).

The Russian case study also emphasizes transition and change, pointing out that despite its long history, Russia is still in the process of becoming a nation state. The case study found that since the fall of communism, textbooks have put more and more emphasis on “the Russian people, statehood and Russian culture”, whereas earlier textbooks included more on the history of other nations within the Russian Federation (Bogohubov et al., 1999, p. 540).

In Bulgaria, another case study country in transition, the disintegration of a sense of national identity is seen as a reason for the alienation of young people. According to the case study authors:

Our national history was rewritten three times in three different ways during the last 120 years. This has affected the national consciousness of young people and confused their national loyalty, identity and national ideals. The inconsistent interpretation and explanation of historical events also reinforces their national nihilism and alienation from the State, increases their interest in emigration, leads to objection to mandatory military service and generally reinforces their criticism and scepticism.

Faced with this situation, Bulgarian schools view the development of a positive national identity and national loyalty (through particular subjects and the “students’ class”, as well as extracurricular and out of school activities) to be of the highest priority (Balkansky et al., 1999, p. 98).

While Germany and Italy avoid the topic of national identity in their schools, and Belgium, Bulgaria, Hong Kong and Russia and have adapted it to meet their present predicaments, Switzerland has responded to the domain in a much different way. Swiss experts consulted for the case study questioned the use of the term “national identity” itself:
Some experts considered this notion not only to be out-dated but also possibly dangerous, while others thought it should be possible to speak of a national identity without automatically making a connection with nationalistic intentions.

... However, the experts seemed to agree that historical consciousness, in the sense of self-reflective confrontation with the history of the country, is important. This formal definition, however, is countered by great gaps in terms of real content; it is not even clear which symbols of Swiss nationhood (as well as events and personalities) are really of unequivocal importance (Reichenbach, 1999, p. 571).

Finally, at the other end of this spectrum of countries, civic education is still used in the more traditional manner that reinforces national identity and makes it a positive goal of schooling. The United States case study, for example, documents the importance of history courses, national symbols like the flag and holidays, national heroes and certain documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights for the teaching of national identity. The case study author found indications of the impact of this teaching in the focus groups conducted for the case study: “In referring to events in the nation’s past, students frequently used terms such as ‘we’, ‘us’ or ‘our’... Clearly, they identified with the narrative they were told in their history books, even when they knew that their own personal ancestors were not part of the dominant group at the time of the particular event to which they referred” (Hahn, 1999, p. 597).

In Greece, as well, students are expected to identify with an illustrious historical tradition that reaches much further into the past than is typical of other countries:

In fact, Greek civilization is considered “superior to any civilization that ever existed.” As such it influenced the whole world and became the basis for modern European civilization. ... The Greek past is presented as a constituent part of the national self, bringing with it long-lasting traits such as ability for great achievements... resistance and “natural” superiority, loyalty to country and willingness to sacrifice for the sake of its freedom (Makrinioti & Solomon, 1999, pp. 299-300).

In summary, the case studies illustrate a wide range of practices and opinions regarding the role of the school in the development of national identity. Even the definition and interpretation of its meaning and importance varies according to each country’s historical perspective, its current challenges, or both. The formation of national identity, which was once the sine qua non of civic education in many countries, is no longer a core domain of much consensus. Similar variation can also be seen in the third and final domain under consideration - social cohesion and diversity.

The case studies give examples of how the emphasis on history and rituals through which schools have sought to reinforce national unity can also be used to celebrate diversity. The Canadian case study refers to a guide for opening and closing exercises in Ontario schools. The authors explain “that one of the purposes of these rituals is to build understanding of and respect for people from a wide variety of traditions... ‘Patriotic activities that build pride in heritage, diversity, interconnectedness, and ideals of Canada are... an important part of opening or closing exercises.’” (Sears et al., 1999, p. 128).

However, the authors also emphasize that national unity has not been overlooked in these rites since, for example, the playing and singing of the national anthem remains compulsory in public schools in Ontario.

The United States case study illustrates the notion that the lessons of diversity do not need to be confined to the positive aspects of history. Teachers and students in focus groups conducted for the case studies indicated that information about slavery and more generally the segregation and discrimination experienced by African-Americans and Native Americans is a part of history courses. Students said they learned about discrimination in conjunction with Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday and the celebration of Black History Month. According to the same focus groups, less attention is given to Hispanics and Asian-Americans.

A history expert known for her research on students’ understanding of history, when interviewed for the case study, declared that “by the end of Grade 8 ‘all of the kids knew there was prejudice’ and that ‘race, class and gender were problematic’ in the history of the United States” (Hahn, 1999, p. 599).

In contrast, in other countries the existence and importance of diversity is still minimized, as this statement from the Greek case study shows: “Representations of the Greek nation that appear in the textbooks (history, geography, language) emphasize its uniform and homogeneous character through time, neglecting to mention internal differentiations, such as the existence of minorities. Moreover, negative representations of ‘national others’ aim at fostering national homogeneity” (Makrinioti & Solomon, 1999, p. 300).

Similarly, in an analysis of a sixth grade Greek textbook, the case study found that “no reference whatsoever is made to any group diverging in any way (ethnic, language, religious, cultural) from the elements and rules constituting the Greek national entity... Minorities in the country are absent” (p. 307). Likewise, in Cyprus, “students of all grades never come to know about the life and the culture of the Turkish Cypriots or about the Maronites, the Armenians and the Latin who live among us” (Papamastasiou & Koutselini-Ioannidou, 1999, p. 168).
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The Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania also downplay certain aspects of diversity. The Hungarian case study illustrates this avoidance through analysis of two textbooks:

The civics textbook written for 14- to 15-year-olds contains only 26 pages of discussion about social issues, does not highlight the problem of social diversity and leaves certain topics such as gender and the Gypsies untouched. The family and social communities are presented as representatives of social cohesion. That said, the social studies text for 18-year-olds presents the family and society as scenes of social diversity for a total of 84 pages, but some topics are missing such as foreigners, nationalities, and religious differences (Márai, 1999, p. 361).

A similar point is made in the Czech Republic in relation to textbooks in civics, history, literature and other subjects. The textbooks are cited for lack of attention to “education for tolerance, antiracism and coexistence with minorities” (Váňková & Kalous, 1999, p. 198).

In Romania, a country with a large Hungarian minority, “most teachers surveyed by [the case study authors] generally considered that there is no need to include ‘social cohesion and diversity’ in the curriculum. The Romanian Constitution stipulates equal rights for all citizens; hence they seem to argue, in a democratic state, there are no underprivileged minorities” (Bunescu et al., 1999, p. 511). In the seventh-grade Romanian civic culture textbook, minorities living in Romania are mentioned, but there is no discussion of the ethnic conflicts of the past or present. This textbook, however, does imply that minorities are a threat to national unity (pp. 511–512).

The Israeli case study gives particular attention to the situation of Israeli Arabs. It takes note of the many obstacles to creating a shared ideology among Arab and Jewish Israeli citizens, adding that Arab cultural autonomy has been discouraged, that Arabs receive fewer resources from the State than their Jewish counterparts, that there is a general atmosphere of mutual alienation and distrust, and that many Arabs in Israel are opposed to integration in the Jewish state (Ichilov, 1999, p. 379). For the case study this situation was addressed through interviews conducted with staff members at an institution that trains teachers for Arab schools in Israel. The respondents at this school saw citizenship education as a process of developing a national identity based on a unique history and cultural heritage while at the same time remaining loyal to the state of Israel. But respondents found this difficult to do. One said: “Independence Day is a sad day for me. . . . I cannot relate to the flag and national anthem.” Another declared: “I belong to the State of Israel, and at the same time I belong to the Arab people and to the Palestinian people in particular. I’m trying to avoid conflicts among these distinct affiliations.” The respondents viewed the existing curriculum as “too narrow, neglecting historical, national and social aspects which are of great significance to the Arab minority”, and said they would like more freedom to design their own curriculum (Ichilov, 1999, pp. 388–389).

In essence, the case studies as a group display some ambivalence about how to deal with diversity without undermining national unity, and substantial differences exist in terms of how each country attempts to adjust its historical expectations of schooling to the demographic and political trends of the contemporary world. In some countries, the negotiation of how national minorities are to be understood and accommodated is a ubiquitous feature of schooling. In other countries, the search for acceptance and recognition of certain minorities remains elusive. The constraints on experts who try to persuade others to accept their views of what constitutes legitimate school knowledge are readily apparent in this domain.

TAKING THE QUIXOTIC OUT OF THE QUEST FOR CIVIC EDUCATION

The case studies show that civic education in school remains problematic in many ways. Although certain countries and many individual schools appear to constitute exceptions in certain respects, civic education has not found a secure and major place in the curriculum as a formal subject matter. Civic education goes against the grain of conventional educational practice in its call for participatory students who have rights to and responsibilities for self-governance. It has not been a priority of teacher education or student assessment efforts, and the comprehensive nature of its agenda has not been widely accepted. Progress in improving civic education in each of the three core domains of democracy, national identity and social cohesion/diversity requires solutions to these problems. But attempts to address these problems to date generally have rendered civic education either marginal or ineffective. It is marginalized when the reforms undertaken are partial and focused solely on the formal curriculum. It is ineffective when comprehensive systemic reforms are implemented without sufficient support and follow-up. In short, civic education typically addresses the great issues of democracy, national identity and social diversity in partial and fragmented ways. The laudable efforts of civic education experts appear to have relatively little impact on school practices (although the second phase of the IEA Civic Education Study provides more representative and conclusive data on what actually happens in schools). It seems that civic education will live up to its aspirations only if it is merged into overall school reform and restructuring movements that are fully capable of mobilizing sufficient support and know-how to put into practice the sort of fundamental
one could say revolutionary – changes called for in the case studies. The
democratic school will not be built on the efforts of civic education reformers
alone.

NOTES

1. In our analyses, we have drawn upon all the national case studies except for those
of Poland and Slovenia, which are reflections of experts rather than representations of
data. Specifically, through the case studies and their supporting documentation we found
several themes related to civic education in schools and provide here examples from
the diverse set of 22 countries. While some similarities exist across countries, many
differences are also evident, most notably in the area of national identity. Therefore, we
did not classify countries by region, years of democracy or system of education but
according to the themes that emerged from the case studies.

2. Source: IEA Civic Education Study Phase 1 database containing the United States
response to framing questions about religion.

3. At the time of data collection in 1998, at least one province in Australia was
developing a mandatory test and thus could be cited as countering this overall trend.

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