

LLAKES Research Paper 5: Briefing Summary

Title: School Systems, Segregation and Civic Competences among Adolescents

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Brief outline of subject and context:

Interestingly, the role of school systems in mitigating segregation and combating pockets of alienation has not received much scholarly attention. This is a surprising omission as the development of such ‘civic deserts’ (i.e. areas in the suburbs of large urban centres where alienation, inter-group hostility and crime prevail) has attracted considerable media attention and has prompted many area-based inclusion policies in West-European countries. As a rule, these deserts are associated with ethnically diverse low status areas where the native majority and various immigrant communities live separate lives and schools and community life in general are strongly segregated along social and ethnic lines. In other words, social and ethnic segregation are seen as important drivers of prejudice, distrust, and a sense of exclusion. This paper tackles this omission and explores the interrelations between education systems, school social and ethnic segregation, and civic competences (understood here as referring to attitudes and behaviours as well as knowledge and skills). It does so by analysing data from the IEA Civic Education Study among 14-year olds.

Key findings:

- Grouping by ability is associated with more social segregation across classrooms but not with more ethnic segregation;
- Grouping by ability also leads to greater disparities of civic knowledge and skills. It is not associated with disparities of civic attitudes and participation;
- In countries practicing grouping by ability the peer effect is much larger than in countries with comprehensive systems (i.e. the effect of classroom social composition on civic knowledge and skills).

Major implications:

- Policy makers interested in combating inequalities would do well to consider comprehensive education with mixed ability classes as it
 - helps to minimize school social segregation
 - helps to reduce disparities of civic knowledge and skills
 - minimizes negative peer effects on student performance.
- Comprehensive education is not a panacea for all social ills as
 - it is unrelated to school ethnic segregation
 - it is unrelated to disparities of civic attitudes and behaviour
- Policy makers should not assume that civic skills, attitudes and behaviours travel as a package. These components can be unrelated to one another or – worse – can mutually exclude each other. Interventions aimed at promoting one civic component can therefore have unintended negative consequences for other components.

Approach/Research Methodology:

The research analysed data of the IEA Civic Education Study (Cived). This study consists of a large scale survey conducted in April 1999 among a sample of 90,000 14-year-olds in 28 countries worldwide. In each country 120-200 schools were selected. In these schools the students of one classroom were interviewed. This nested design allows researchers to explore both conditions of the school and of the classroom (such as ethnic diversity) on the one hand and characteristics of individuals (such as social background and gender) on the other. The national samples of thirteen Western states were selected for the research. The research made use of multilevel analysis to explore the interrelation between education systems, segregation and civic competences.

Findings/results/outputs of research

A distinct regularity was found between the degree and timing of ability grouping on the one hand and levels of classroom segregation and inequalities of civic competences on the other. In states with full comprehensive systems (i.e. with no grouping by ability and a network of uniform all-through schools), levels of social segregation were low and disparities of civic competences across classes were comparatively small (however, this applied more to the cognitive component of civic competences than to the normative and behavioural component). In contrast, countries with early selection systems showed marked degrees of social segregation and displayed relatively large cross-classroom differences in civic competences. Ethnic segregation levels, however, did not show a meaningful link with ability grouping since the full comprehensive group actually showed relatively high, and the early selection group relatively low, levels of ethnic segregation.

Education systems also appeared to influence the effect of classroom social status on civic knowledge and skills. In the full comprehensive group (i.e. the Scandinavian countries) this effect disappeared after controlling for individual background variables, while it retained its strong positive effect in countries with systems allowing for grouping by ability in various degrees. This finding is in agreement with the proposition that in systems which minimize ability grouping the effect of classroom compositional features, such as social status, on civic competences is likely to be small. The OECD PISA studies have found a very similar pattern of cross-country variation in the effect of school social status on literacy and numeracy skills.

As civic knowledge and skills are bound to depend a lot on general linguistic competence it makes sense to find the two patterns corresponding closely.

In sum, for policy makers interested in reducing social segregation, combating pockets of ignorance, and neutralizing the effect of school social status on the cognitive dimension of civic competences, reforms aimed at maximizing mixed ability classes and minimizing cross-school differentiation would certainly be worth considering.

However, the analyses also showed that the effects of the social and ethnic composition of classrooms on civic *attitudes* and *behaviours* are not related to ability grouping. Particularly the strong effect of classroom diversity on all four civic outcomes in the full comprehensive group was not expected. More generally, the effects of the two compositional conditions appeared to vary across these outcomes and across education systems. Thus, as straightforward the pattern of effects was with regard to civic knowledge and skills, as unpredictable it was with regard to attitudes and behaviours. The pattern further suggests that a relation found between a classroom condition and a certain civic outcome in one education system can neither be generalized to other civic outcomes nor to other educational or regional contexts. Apparently region-specific factors play an important role in shaping such relations. Even more importantly, the unpredictable pattern of effects suggest that civic competencies do not “travel as a package”, as Rice and Feldman (1997: 1150) believe. If some of them do, the ‘syndrome’ of civic culture they constitute is likely to be regionally unique and subject to local conditions. This means that policy interventions that are effective in one context in fostering civic attitudes and behaviours among youngsters may well fail in another.



The full research paper may be downloaded from www.llakes.org

Information about LLAKES:

The Lifelong Learning in Knowledge Economies and Societies (LLAKES) Research Centre is funded by the ESRC, and is led by Professor Andy Green. The Centre investigates the roles of lifelong learning both in promoting economic competitiveness and social cohesion, and in mediating the interactions between the two domains. Key areas of research include:

- i) the social and cultural foundations of learning, knowledge production and transfer, and innovation, within the context of a changing economy, and
- ii) the effects of knowledge and skill distribution on income equality, social cohesion and competitiveness.

LLAKES has a programme of inter-disciplinary and mixed method research which addresses these issues at the level of the individual life course, through studies of city-regions and sectors in the UK, and through comparative analysis across OECD countries. The Centre's research is organised around three strands:

- Strand 1, on 'Models of Lifelong Learning and the Knowledge Society,' is led by Germ Janmaat and investigates the impact of lifelong learning systems on economic competitiveness and social cohesion at the national level;
- Strand 2, on 'Regenerating City-Regions: Learning Environments, Knowledge Transfer and Innovative Pedagogy' is led by Lorna Unwin and focuses on communities and sectors;
- Strand 3, on 'Life Chances and Learning throughout the Life Course' is led by Karen Evans and uses longitudinal data to analyse how people manage risk and change at critical points in their learning careers.

The Centre also runs an annual programme of events, including research seminars and conferences.

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Details of the Centre's publications and events programme may be found at www.llakes.org.