IEA Research for Educators 3

Evidence-based and Instructional Materials for Teachers Using Data from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)

Valeria Damiani *Editor*

Experiencing Democracy in the Classroom

Building Democratic Learning Environments to Promote Civic Learning

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Evidence-based and Instructional Materials for Teachers Using Data from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)

Volume 3

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IEA continues to promote capacity building and knowledge sharing to foster innovation and quality in education, proudly uniting more than 60 member institutions, with studies conducted in more than 100 countries worldwide.

IEA's comprehensive data provide an unparalleled longitudinal resource for researchers and educators. The founders of IEA viewed the world as a natural educational laboratory, where different school systems experiment in different ways to obtain optimal results from educating their youth. They assumed that if research could obtain evidence from across a wide range of systems, the variability would be sufficient to reveal important relationships that would otherwise escape detection within a single education system. They strongly rejected data-free assertions about the relative merits of various education systems and aimed to identify factors that would have meaningful and consistent influences on educational outcomes.

In line with this, this series of peer-reviewed publications is established to contribute to educational practices. The goal is to inspire educators by translating IEA research findings into evidence-based practice, and to foster engagement and conversation between researchers and practitioners.

Valeria Damiani
Editor

Experiencing Democracy in the Classroom

Building Democratic Learning Environments to Promote Civic Learning

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Foreword

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) mission is to enhance knowledge about education systems worldwide and to provide high-quality data that will support education advancement and lead to better teaching and learning in schools. In pursuit of this aim, it conducts and reports on major studies of student achievement in citizenship, digital literacy, mathematics, science, and reading. These studies, notably the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS), the Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (LaNA), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), are well established and have set the benchmark for international comparative studies in education.

The studies have generated vast datasets encompassing student achievement, disaggregated in a variety of ways, along with a wealth of contextual information that contains considerable explanatory power. The numerous reports that have emerged from them are a valuable contribution to the corpus of educational research.

Valuable though these detailed reports are, IEA's goal of supporting education advancement needs something more: deep understanding of education systems and the many factors that bear on student learning advances through in-depth analysis of the global datasets. IEA has long championed such analysis and facilitates scholars and policymakers in conducting secondary analysis of our datasets. So, we provide software such as the International Database Analyzer to encourage the analysis of our datasets and support numerous publications, including a peer-reviewed journal, *Large-scale Assessments in Education*; our policy brief series, *IEA Compass: Briefs in Education*; and our *IEA Research for Education* book series, providing a powerful information avenue for researchers and policymakers. We also organize a biennial international research conference to nurture exchanges between researchers and policymakers working with IEA data.

The ***IEA Research for Educators*** series represents an important effort by IEA to critically examine our datasets for a key audience, teachers. IEA studies have always been a great resource for researchers and policymakers. However, the desire remained to give something back to those schools and teachers who responded to studies and provided the valuable information that is gathered and organized in the form of an international database. Our aim is to connect the growing body of knowledge based on IEA studies, as well as other research findings, with school and classroom realities. This series aims to translate IEA study data into evidence-based and instructional materials for teachers and, in doing so, foster engagement and conversation between researchers and practitioners.

This book, the third volume in the IEA Research for Educators series, draws on findings from IEA's International Civic and Citizenship Education Study. It connects evidence from

this large-scale international assessment with classroom-level strategies, highlighting how an open classroom climate, student participation, inclusive practices, and active learning approaches contribute to the development of civic knowledge, attitudes, and engagement.

Democracy is not learned solely through textbooks or formal instruction; it is lived, practiced, and experienced through everyday interactions and shared decision-making. Next to the larger community, family, friends, and peers, teachers play a central role in this process. As spaces where young people encounter difference, classrooms and schools offer unique opportunities for students to experience democratic principles in action: talk through rules, express opinions, and learn to work together. This volume, Experiencing Democracy in the Classroom, explores how democratic learning environments can be intentionally fostered through teaching practices, school culture, and engagement with the local community, supporting students' civic learning in meaningful and authentic ways. By combining research evidence with concrete examples and reflective questions, the book supports educators in exploring how democracy can be experienced—not only taught—within their own educational contexts.

Achieving the aims of this book series requires drawing on the expertise and experience of IEA's member institutions, national research centers, and partner organizations involved in IEA studies. This collective knowledge makes it possible to bridge international research, diverse classroom realities, and the professional needs of educators. We are extremely grateful to the team of authors from LUMSA University, Rome, for their commitment, insight, and collaborative spirit in developing this volume. Their work exemplifies the shared mission of the IEA Research for Educators series: to translate key insights from IEA studies into practical strategies and lesson ideas. This volume uses research to empower teachers in advancing learning for participation in democratic societies.

Paulína Koršňáková
Andrea Netten
Series Editors
IEA Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Preface

Civic and citizenship education (CCE) is a complex field. While it is considered a cornerstone of schooling by those involved in education at various levels—from policymakers to school leaders and teachers—it is simultaneously perceived as an "uncomfortable" area, often difficult to implement in educational practice. This difficulty stems primarily from its dual nature: it is both a well-defined subject area with its own specific themes and learning objectives, and, at the same time, an eminently cross-curricular area, involving the entire curriculum and the diverse experiences students have both inside and outside of school. The gaps between statements of principle and actual school practice, repeatedly highlighted by research in this field, derive in part from this complex, twofold nature of CCE.

In liberal-democratic societies, civic and citizenship education is not a neutral field: it is deeply anchored in the values and principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, and it is influenced by the political and public debate on how societies should be shaped. From this perspective, curricular content is necessary to build awareness of the issues affecting our societies, but it is not sufficient. The values and principles of citizenship require concrete examples and the practical application of what is taught, studied, and discussed through direct experience. In civic and citizenship education, "the medium is the message": values and principles must be known and analyzed in their multiple implications, but they must also be practiced. The school as a whole represents a privileged context for experiencing democratic citizenship within and beyond the curriculum by promoting democratic learning environments where students can experience the principles of democracy in their daily practice.

This book stems from the need to provide methodological and practical support to all those who live and work in schools (primarily principals and teachers) and who are interested in harnessing the full potential of CCE while addressing its manifold dimensions and challenges. It is the result of several years of research experience gained through participation in international comparative studies, such as the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS,) and through training programs both at international and national levels.

The book is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides a comprehensive introduction to the core features of civic and citizenship education—including its conceptualization, aims, curriculum, and content—establishing the foundation for the subsequent sections of the book. Democratic learning environments are introduced in Chapter 2 through the framework of the whole-school approach (WSA). The discussion focuses on four core elements of the WSA: an open classroom climate, active and experiential learning, decision-making processes, and collaboration between schools and the community. This chapter examines how these features shape classroom discussion and deliberation,

school organization and rules, cooperative learning, and students' ability to monitor their own progress through formative assessments. Chapter 3 explores how the ICCS study offers insights into developing democratic learning environments, highlighting how the study has deepened our understanding of the importance of fostering such environments for students' civic learning and engagement. Teaching strategies to implement CCE and build democratic learning environments are presented in Chapter 4, providing examples of problem- and project-based learning, case-based learning, discussions and debates, role-playing, and lateral reading for civic online reasoning. Finally, Chapter 5 presents five examples of good practice from four ICCS participating countries: Brazil, Slovenia, the Netherlands, and Italy. All examples share a commitment to democratic learning environments through active and experiential learning methodologies that foster democratic engagement and critical reflection.

Although the text refers primarily to civic and citizenship education, building democratic learning environments potentially concerns all subject areas and can have positive effects on the school as a whole. Working on the contexts for CCE at the classroom, school, and local community levels is an essential aspect of this field, yet it presents several challenges for schools and teachers: it requires collegiality in decision-making, flexibility in organizational structures, openness, participation, and trust. Above all, it requires continuous reflection by everyone in the school community on the meaning of the school experience as a whole, understood as an experience of democracy. This book aims to be a tool for the entire school community to initiate a shared reflection on the ways in which the school experience can truly be an experience of democracy.

Democracy cannot be taken for granted; indeed, it "has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife" (Dewey, 1916). In this light, schools can contribute to its rebirth and, consequently, its protection.

Valeria Damiani
Editor
Rome, Italy

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Chapter 1

Civic and Citizenship Education: From Conceptualization to Classroom Practice

Valeria Damiani

Abstract

The chapter provides a comprehensive introduction to the core features of civic and citizenship education (CCE), establishing the foundation for the subsequent sections of the book. It aims to explore the multilayered components of CCE, from its complex underpinnings to its practical application in schools and classrooms. It starts by examining the concept of citizenship and the notion of the *good citizen*, then moves on to key elements of CCE—including its definition, general aims, intended learning outcomes, curriculum content, and its approaches for implementation. The concluding section highlights the essential role all teachers play (regardless of subject area) in fostering not only students' knowledge and understanding but also their civic values, attitudes, and engagement.

Keywords

civic and citizenship education (CCE), CCE curriculum, CCE education content, good citizen

1.1 Introduction

Teachers today are preparing students to navigate a world marked by profound and complex challenges. From the climate crisis and socioeconomic inequalities to the rise of authoritarian and populist movements and declining trust in democratic institutions, contemporary societies are under increasing pressure. Long-standing democracies are being tested in new ways; low levels of political and electoral participation and global conflicts continue to unsettle communities. These realities shape the lives of young people and the contexts in which they learn. Faced with this, education and, more specifically, schools and teachers have a key role in fostering younger generations' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs in building an inclusive society based on the values of human rights and democracy. In this context, civic and citizenship education (CCE) has become an increasingly relevant area in many education systems around the world, as it aims to promote students' understanding of and their engagement in contemporary societies (European Commission/European Education and Culture Executive Agency [EACEA]/Eurydice, 2017; Schulz et al., 2025).

This first chapter introduces the main features of CCE, setting the stage for the following sections. Its goal is to present the multilayered components of CCE, ranging from its contested conceptualization to its implementation in schools and classrooms. Beginning with an overview of citizenship and the idea of *the good citizen*, the chapter explores some

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of the key aspects of CCE, including its definition, aims, intended learning outcomes, content, and curriculum design. Although it is beyond the scope of this publication to discuss the broad debates surrounding CCE, further reading suggestions that may be useful for teachers in shaping their CCE activities and initiatives are provided at the end of the chapter.

1.2 Framing Citizenship and the Good Citizen

Identifying and defining aims and objectives of CCE is a complex task, as CCE is a multifaceted field, characterized by ongoing debates surrounding its goals, characteristics, and preferred pedagogical approaches. These debates reflect a wider discussion on the very definition of citizenship. To meaningfully explore the key aspects of CCE, it is necessary to first address, even if briefly, the sensitive issue of how citizenship is conceptualized.

The challenges in providing a clear definition of *citizenship* lie in the continuous shifting over time of its core dimensions (i.e., the civil, social, and political dimensions; Marshall, 1949) and, more generally, the evolution of human society itself. Recent social and political changes, such as the rise of populist movements, the emergence of so-called post-democracies (Crouch, 2004), mass migration, and globalization, have challenged the traditional notion of democracy and citizenship. For example, the concept of *multilevel citizenship* challenges the idea that citizenship can be conferred solely by nation-states. Non-state actors and international communities and organizations operating below and above the state level (such as the European Union) have become increasingly relevant in promoting and protecting individual rights and status (Jamieson, 2002; Maas, 2013). This concept is strongly intertwined with the idea of *multilayered citizenship*, whereby individuals can hold multiple citizenships or belong to different levels of citizenship simultaneously, at the local, national, and even transnational or supranational levels. This conceptualization broadens the features of citizenship beyond the national borders by including other affiliations and identities at various levels of social and political organization (Seubert et al., 2018).

Nowadays, the meaning of citizenship continues to shift, as we witness growing distrust in government and key institutions, democratic backsliding, declining voting rates, and diminished interest in politics (Galston, 2003; Hedtke et al., 2017). Defined in the simplest and most comprehensive terms, citizenship in a democracy is rooted in shared political knowledge and guaranteed membership, identity, values, and rights (Knight Abowitz & Harnish, 2006).

In contemporary democratic societies, the citizen is envisioned as an individual capable of reflection and active engagement in social and political issues, contributing to the good of society (Westheimer, 2008). According to educational policies, this idea of engagement often refers mainly to conventional forms of involvement and to values built on a peaceful view of democracy based on social cohesion (Zimenkova, 2008). Recent studies have, however, contested the idea of *good citizenship*, which mostly relates to

loyalty and adherence to prescribed norms and values, and instead suggest that the concept of citizenship incorporate elements such as disagreement, critical engagement, and protest in pursuit of social justice (Norris, 1999). In this view, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) differentiate between three different conceptualizations of the citizen:

- The *personally responsible citizen*, who acts individually to help those in need and the community, (e.g., by giving blood, recycling, and obeying laws).
- The *participatory citizen*, who is engaged collectively at different levels, from local, to state and national.
- The *justice-oriented citizen*, who critically analyzes social, economic, and political structures, taking collective actions to address social injustice.

Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) conceptualizations of the good citizen are intended to be interconnected rather than sequential, allowing for simultaneous inclusion in the curriculum. According to them, curricula aimed at fostering personally responsible citizens could focus on developing personal traits such as honesty, self-discipline, and a strong work ethic; those designed to support the development of participatory citizens could include topics such as the functioning of governments and elections, as well as the importance of organizing collaborative efforts for people in need; while curricula promoting the justice-oriented citizen could focus on teaching ways that society can be improved and how actions for change can be undertaken.

There is an extensive body of research on the analysis of the good citizen (Villalobos et al., 2021), a notion that was also included in the assessment framework and study instruments of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) studies on CCE (Textbox 1.1).

As with the notion of citizenship, the idea of the good citizen is multilayered, and the meaning of the term is understood differently across contexts (Treviño & Carrasco, 2021). This is why it is important to understand the ideas that teachers and young people have of citizenship (and subsequently of the good citizen) and whether, and to what extent, these ideas corresponds to the different conceptualizations identified at the policy and research level.

IEA studies of CCE have been measuring students' perceptions of the importance of different types of behaviors for good citizenship since the first study of civic education (as part of a six-subject study) and the Civic Education Study (CIVED) (Torney et al., 1975; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). One of the most relevant references was the distinction between *conventional* (voting, running for office) and *unconventional* (social movement) citizenship activities (grass-roots campaigns, protest activities) (Barnes & Kaase, 1979).

Building on this, the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) (2009, 2016, 2022) investigated students' perceptions of the importance of different types of good citizenship behaviors and identified two main sub-dimensions concerned with conventional and with social-movement-related citizenship behavior (Schulz et al.,

2010, 2018). In addition to these two types of good citizenship behaviors, the latest round of ICCS (in 2022) investigated students' perceptions of the importance of globally oriented citizenship (Schulz et al., 2025; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2015).

Textbox 1.1 What makes a *good citizen*? Insights from IEA studies

Since the 1970s, IEA's international studies of civic and citizenship education have explored what young people believe it means to be a *good citizen*. These studies provide insight into how students value different kinds of civic behaviors.

In the last round of IEA's International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), researchers identified three key types of citizenship and related behaviors. Below are a few examples of items referring to these three types of citizenship included in ICCS 2022:

- Conventional citizenship: voting in every national election; joining a political party.
- Social-movement-related citizenship: participating in peaceful protests against laws believed to be unjust; taking part in activities promoting human rights.
- Globally oriented citizenship: showing interest in different cultures and languages; supporting initiatives that promote equal opportunities for all people across the world.

Source: The above examples are items about good citizenship behaviors taken from IEA ICCS 2022 (Schulz et al., 2025).

1.3 Civic and Citizenship Education

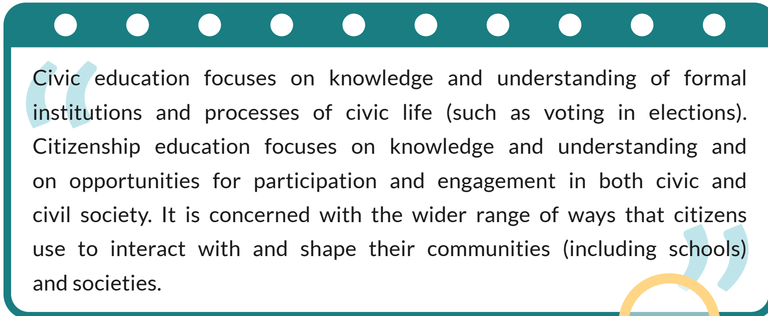
This section outlines the key features of CCE, including its definition, aims, intended learning outcomes, and curriculum content.

1.3.1 What is CCE?

Different conceptualizations of citizenship and of the good citizen influence the way citizenship education is designed and implemented—shaping CCE curriculum development, learning goals, and classroom activities, often emphasizing certain aspects over others. In this context, the aims and content of citizenship education continue to evolve in response to societal changes. Analyzing CCE over time allows a view of its dynamic and multidimensional nature.

This book adopts the definition of CCE developed during the first cycle of the IEA ICCS study in 2009 (Schulz et al., 2010). This definition takes a holistic view, encompassing the knowledge of civic issues and active participation at the levels of the individual, the school, and society (Textbox 1.2). It reflects the complex nature of citizenship education that encompasses formal aspects like rights and duties while also emphasizing active participation in a democratic society (McLaughlin, 1992).

Textbox 1.2 The definition of CCE in ICCS



Civic education focuses on knowledge and understanding of formal institutions and processes of civic life (such as voting in elections). Citizenship education focuses on knowledge and understanding and on opportunities for participation and engagement in both civic and civil society. It is concerned with the wider range of ways that citizens use to interact with and shape their communities (including schools) and societies.

Source: Schulz et al., 2010, p. 22.

This definition mirrors the evolution of the traditional notion of citizenship, leading to new interpretations of the concepts and practices associated with it, such as national identity, belonging, rights, and responsibilities (Banks, 2008; White & Openshaw, 2005). In education, the shift from traditional models of citizenship to a broader understanding of its concepts and practices is reflected in the move from the term *civic education* to the more inclusive notion of *citizenship education*. Many countries now use this broader term, which significantly expands the scope of the learning area. This shift places greater emphasis on civic participation and more clearly reflects the underlying purpose(s) of civic education (Carretero et al., 2016). It is important to note, however, that the main features of CCE (i.e., its definition and scope) have to be understood in relation to the wider social and political setting in which CCE is embedded (e.g., the organization of the education system and the country's historical traditions and socio-political structure). These features could influence its conceptualization, regulations, and delivery (Keating, 2014; Kerr, 1999).

1.3.2 CCE Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes

It is now widely accepted, in the majority of education systems and in international documents and recommendations, that CCE cannot be limited to the promotion of knowledge alone but also includes the development of civic-related attitudes, skills, and engagement towards civic and citizenship issues in a lifelong perspective (Council

of the European Union, 2006, 2018; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017; Eurydice, 2005, 2012). CCE learning outcomes are therefore framed broadly to include the development of a cognitive dimension (civic knowledge and understanding) as well as attitudinal and behavioral dimensions (values, attitudes, and engagement). The definitions of the CCE dimensions are presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Definitions of CCE dimensions

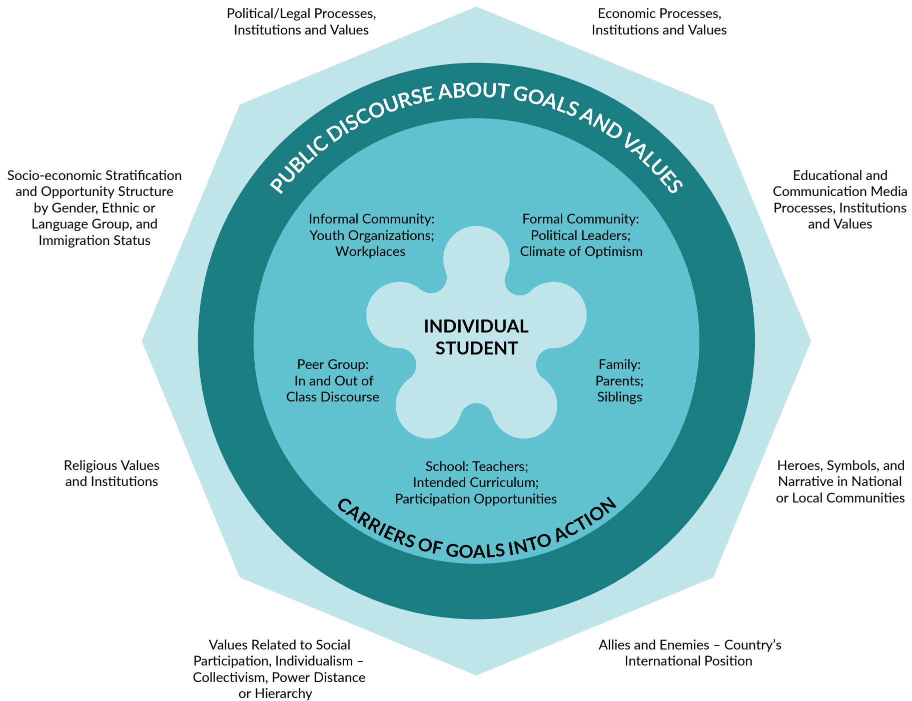
Knowledge and understanding	Knowledge refers to the facts and information acquired by a person, while understanding is related to the comprehension of meanings (Council of Europe, 2018).
Attitudes and values	An attitude can be defined as "the overall mental orientation which an individual adopts towards someone or something (for example a person, a group, an institution, an issue, an event, or a symbol). Attitudes usually consist of four components: a belief or opinion about the object of the attitude, an emotion or feeling towards the object, an evaluation (either positive or negative) of the object, and a tendency to behave in a particular way towards that object" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 41). Attitudes can change over time, and individuals can have contradictory attitudes at the same time. Values are "general beliefs that individuals hold about the desirable goals that should be striven for in life" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 38). They stimulate taking action and they are also intended as principles for guiding action. Values are normative and prescriptive, providing criteria for evaluating and guiding an individual's actions in a wide range of situations.
Engagement	Engagement refers to the development of students' active participation through, for instance, their involvement in school and community life but also their expectations for future civic action and the acquisition of skills needed to contribute to public life (Schulz et al., 2010).

The primary aim of CCE is therefore twofold: to equip students with knowledge about civic-related issues and to empower them to use their knowledge in understanding and actively participating in society (Kerr, 1999). In CCE, the cognitive and the affective-behavioral domains are intended to be closely interconnected. On the one hand, fostering students' knowledge and understandings of civic-related concepts provides a foundation for meaningful participation in society. On the other hand, promoting civic attitudes and providing opportunities for engagement help develop students' dispositions to positively contribute to their communities. These experiences also deepen their understanding of key civic and citizenship issues, reinforcing the link between learning and action (Biesta, 2007; Blasko et al., 2018; Haste, 2004; ten Dam et al., 2011). Conversely, the adoption of purely formal approaches to CCE, that is, content-led and knowledge-based approaches, limits the potential of CCE.

In this view, research has pointed out that the way students develop their civic knowledge and understanding, as well as affective-behavioral dispositions towards civic and citizenship issues, potentially depends on many factors at the school level but also beyond the school learning environment (Amnå et al., 2009; Neundorf et al., 2016; Wray-Lake, 2019).

The model developed for the second IEA study on civic education (CIVED 1999) (Fig. 1.1) clearly illustrates the influences of different contexts and "agents of socialization" (Torney-Purta et al., 2001, p. 21) in the way young people learn about and participate in civic-related issues. This model is depicted as an octagon representing the "nested context for young people's thinking and action in the social environment" (p. 21). At the center is the individual student, positioned as the key agent of the civic world—both shaping and being shaped by multiple layers of influence. These include family and peer groups, school and local community, as well as national and international contexts. Relevant factors span broad dimensions: the education system, values, religious beliefs, symbols and traditions, and socioeconomic and political structures (Fig. 1.1; Textbox 1.3). This model demonstrates how young people learn about CCE not just through formal classroom instruction, but through the connections and interactions they have with multiple civic communities, including schools (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

Figure 1.1 The Octagon Model of IEA's CIVED



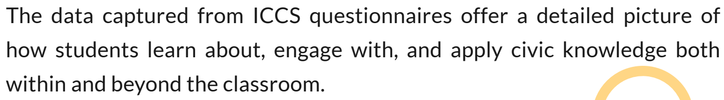
Source: Modified from Torney-Purta et al., 2001, p. 21.

Textbox 1.3 The Octagon Model in ICCS: Understanding CCE

The Octagon Model, first developed for the IEA Civic Education Study (CIVED) in 1999, has guided the approach of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) since its first cycle in 2009.

This model illustrates how young people's civic learning and actions are shaped by a range of interconnected influences, from peers, schools, and the local community to broader social, educational, and political contexts.

ICCS reflects this multidimensional approach through several instruments that explore both formal and non-formal contexts for civic learning, including what students are taught, how they engage, and the environments in which they develop civic values and attitudes: the civic knowledge test, the student, teacher, and school questionnaires, the regional student questionnaires, and the national context survey.



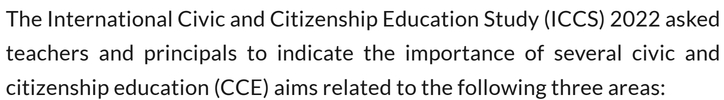
The data captured from ICCS questionnaires offer a detailed picture of how students learn about, engage with, and apply civic knowledge both within and beyond the classroom.

Source: Schulz et al., 2010, 2018, 2025. For more details about ICCS data collection instruments, see Chapter 3, Section 3.2.

The aims of CCE can vary widely across educational systems, shaped by each country's culture, traditions, and approaches to governing education (i.e., whether a country has a centralized or decentralized system).

It is important to distinguish between, on the one hand, general aims and goals that characterize CCE at the country level and, on the other hand, the specific objectives that can be identified at the school level, depending on the degree of autonomy and responsibility schools have for organizing the curriculum and instruction. These aims can also vary from one level of education to the next. In primary education, for instance, it can be common to give stronger attention to learning content and the skills that are more closely related to young children's experience, rather than on the learning of theoretical knowledge (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). Textbox 1.4 presents suggestions for general aims for CCE from ICCS 2022, related to eighth-grade students.

Textbox 1.4 CCE aims in ICCS 2022



The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2022 asked teachers and principals to indicate the importance of several civic and citizenship education (CCE) aims related to the following three areas:

a) The development of knowledge and skills
b) The development of a sense of responsibility
c) The development of active participation

a) The development of knowledge and skills

CCE aims:

- Promoting knowledge of social, political, and civic institutions
- Promoting students' knowledge of the connections between local and global issues

- Developing students’ skills and competencies in conflict resolution
- Promoting knowledge of citizens’ rights and responsibilities
- Promoting students’ critical and independent thinking

b) The development of a sense of responsibility

CCE aims:

- Promoting respect for and safeguarding of the environment
- Promoting students’ sense of belonging to the global community
- Supporting the development of effective strategies to reduce racism
- Promoting the capacity to defend one’s own point of view

c) The development of active participation

CCE aims:

- Promoting students’ participation in the local community
- Preparing students for future political engagement
- Promoting students’ participation in school life
- Promoting students’ engagement for a fairer and more peaceful world

Source: Schulz et al., 2025.

1.3.3 CCE Curriculum Content

The multidimensional nature of CCE—reflected in its general aims and learning outcomes at both school and broader societal levels—is evident in the wide array of curriculum content typically associated with this learning area.

In the last Eurydice[1] report, the curriculum analysis conducted across 42 European educational systems found no consistent pattern in the inclusion of citizenship-related content and competences, with countries adopting different approaches and priorities (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

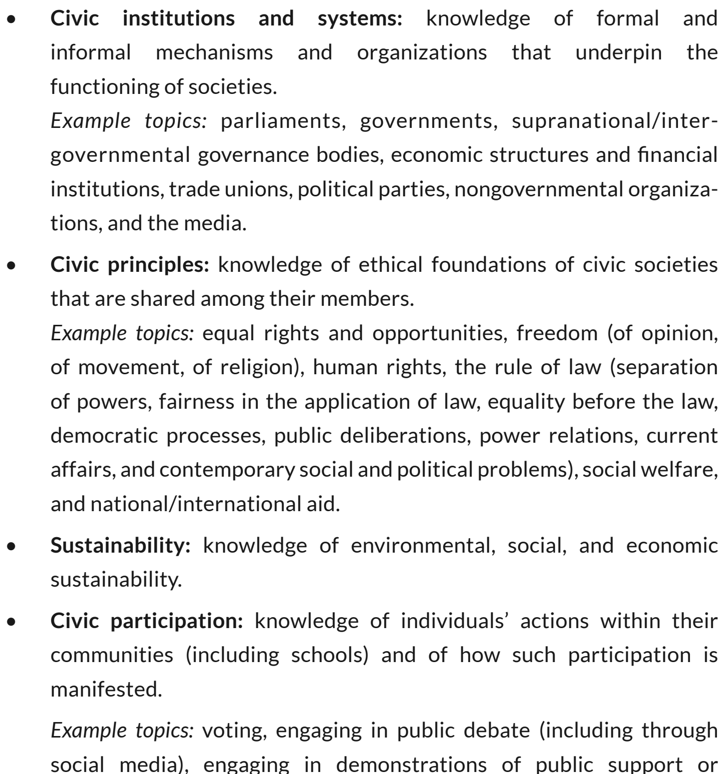
It is beyond the scope of this publication to provide a single and comprehensive overview of the CCE-related curriculum content. Instead, we have analyzed and merged the mapping of CCE-related themes from two key sources: the ICCS assessment frameworks (Schulz et al., 2008, 2016, 2023) and the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (Council of Europe, 2018). Although these documents are underpinned by different rationales and pursue different aims, they

[1] Eurydice is a European network with the aim of analyzing the different education systems in Europe. Its publications concern comparative studies on specific topics and the analysis of European national education systems. For more information, visit the Eurydice website: https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/

follow the same strategy in mapping CCE content: that is, identifying cognitive (knowledge and understanding) and affective-behavioral (values, attitudes, and engagement) dimensions of CCE. These dimensions are understood as interrelated and, depending on the level of students' involvement and the kind of activity, may apply to formal instruction as well as other learning environments beyond the classroom, with varying degrees of emphasis. For instance, the *knowledge and understanding* dimension mainly refers to the formal acquisition of CCE-related content, while the *engagement* dimension requires greater involvement from students in taking action within a given context (for example, the school or the local community).

Textboxes 1.5a, 1.5b, and 1.5c provide examples of curriculum content related to the three main CCE dimensions—*knowledge and understanding*, *attitudes and values*, and *engagement*.

Textbox 1.5a Example topics on knowledge and understanding in CCE



- **Civic institutions and systems:** knowledge of formal and informal mechanisms and organizations that underpin the functioning of societies.
  Example topics: parliaments, governments, supranational/intergovernmental governance bodies, economic structures and financial institutions, trade unions, political parties, nongovernmental organizations, and the media.
- **Civic principles:** knowledge of ethical foundations of civic societies that are shared among their members.
  Example topics: equal rights and opportunities, freedom (of opinion, of movement, of religion), human rights, the rule of law (separation of powers, fairness in the application of law, equality before the law, democratic processes, public deliberations, power relations, current affairs, and contemporary social and political problems), social welfare, and national/international aid.
- **Sustainability:** knowledge of environmental, social, and economic sustainability.
- **Civic participation:** knowledge of individuals' actions within their communities (including schools) and of how such participation is manifested.

  Example topics: voting, engaging in public debate (including through social media), engaging in demonstrations of public support or

protest (including virtually), volunteering, and participating in cultural, community, or interest-based organizations.

- **Civic roles and identities:** knowledge related to concepts of nation, ethnic origin, and cultural heritage.
  Example topics: multiple identities (national, supranational, ethnic, religious, and cultural identities), citizens' roles and responsibilities within their civic society, and global awareness.

Source: Council of Europe, 2018; Schulz et al., 2023.

Textbox 1.5b Examples of attitudes and values in CCE

- **Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views, and practices**
  Examples: showing sensitivity towards cultural diversity and to views, beliefs, values, and practices that differ from one's own; demonstrating interest in discovering and learning about other cultures and perspectives.
- **Respect**
  Examples: displaying a positive regard and esteem for the beliefs, opinions, lifestyles, and practices adopted by other people, as long as these do not undermine or violate the dignity, human rights, or freedoms of others.
- **Civic-mindedness**
  Examples: having a sense of solidarity with other people in the community and willingness to contribute actively to community life.
- **Responsibility**
  Examples: willingness to take ownership of one's own actions and consequences and to reflect on and evaluate one's own decisions and behavior.
- **Attitudes towards relevant civic and citizenship education issues and institutions**
  Examples: attitudes towards gender equality, rights of immigrants, sustainability, and political systems; levels of trust in institutions at local, regional, national, and international levels.

- **Valuing human dignity and human rights**
  Examples: acknowledging the importance of promoting the respect and protection of human rights; recognizing the shared humanity and equal dignity of all human beings.
- **Valuing cultural diversity**
  Examples: respecting each person's right to be different and to hold their own views and beliefs; respecting the views and beliefs of others, provided they do not represent a threat to human rights and others' freedoms.
- **Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality, and the rule of law**
  Examples: recognizing the value of and providing support for democratic processes and procedures, even if they are thought/judged to require change or improvement; supporting peaceful conflict resolution; supporting social justice and acting responsibly in society.

Source: Council of Europe, 2018; Schulz et al., 2023.

Textbox 1.5c Examples of engagement in CCE

Examples of engagement are strongly related to the knowledge of civic participation (see Textbox 1.5a)

Engagement in civic and citizenship education is focused on providing students with opportunities to practice democratic principles and participate in related activities inside and outside the school. These experiences, whether inside the classroom or beyond, offer valuable opportunities for students to deepen their civic-related knowledge, skills, and attitudes. They also support active interaction with various civic communities that students are part of, as illustrated in the Octagon Model (Fig. 1.1).

Examples of CCE engagement may include:

- **Civic engagement in the digital space:** using social media or other online platforms to engage with civic-related activities, for example, searching for information about political or social issues, or posting, sharing, or commenting on content related to such issues.
- **Community involvement:** taking part in local groups or organizations that promote civil engagement, for example groups or organizations campaigning for a particular cause, such as environmental protection, human rights, or animal rights, religious associations, and/or youth clubs.

- **School-based civic activities:** Participating in organized debates, voting for class representatives or school parliament/council, or running as a candidate for these positions.
- **Collaborative civic activities:** Taking part in civic-related activities carried out by the school in partnership with external groups or organizations, such as environmental sustainability projects; initiatives supporting underprivileged people or groups; awareness campaigns on social issues, such as poverty, gender equality, and domestic violence against women; and activities related to promoting human rights.

Source: Schulz et al., 2023.

The mapping of CCE dimensions and examples can help frame both the content and the learning outcomes of CCE instruction, as well as the opportunities provided for students to develop their civic-related knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. However, it is important to note that in the delivery of CCE activities, these three dimensions are always engaged simultaneously, though with varying degrees of emphasis. This becomes particularly evident when students engage in real-life situations related to civic and citizenship issues, which require them to draw on a combination of knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills to accomplish a given task. In this context, the literature often refers to the concept of *competence*. Within the field of CCE there are many definitions and varying ways to interpret and apply this concept. Textbox 1.6 includes two definitions, developed by the Council of Europe and the European Union. Both highlight the interdependence of the CCE dimensions and can help teachers reflect on how these elements are applied in their teaching and in CCE-related activities at both classroom and school levels.

Textbox 1.6 Competence in CCE: two core definitions

Citizenship competence

The Recommendation of 22 May 2018 of the Council of the European Union on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning[2] defines *citizenship competence* as "the ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life, based on understanding of social,

[2] The recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning adopted by the Council of the European Union identifies eight key competences that are all interconnected and crucial to active citizenship, employability, and social inclusion. It is a key document that defines competences needed in contemporary and future societies (Council of the European Union, 2018). It also provides some specific examples of key knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to citizenship competence.

economic, legal, and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability" (p. 10).

Democratic and intercultural competence

The Council of Europe defines *democratic and intercultural competence* as the "ability to mobilize and deploy relevant values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities" (p. 32) that are presented by democratic and intercultural situations.

Source: Council of the European Union, 2018, p. 10.; Council of Europe, 2018, p. 32.

Furthermore, the European Commission's recent plan, *The Union of Skills* (2025), identifies citizenship as one of the core skills—alongside literacy, mathematics, science, and digital skills—for young people to develop and a key element to strengthen education and training (European Commission, 2025).

1.3.4 The CCE Curriculum

The wide range of aims, learning outcomes, and content areas gives CCE strong potential to link to every subject in the curriculum while also maintaining its own distinctive features. In some educational systems, however, CCE is not treated as a separate subject with a specific title, set time allocation, and dedicated teachers, as is the case for other curricular subjects such as history or mathematics. Depending on context, CCE may be compulsory or optional, delivered as a stand-alone subject or embedded across all the aspects of schooling through a whole-school approach (Council of Europe, 2018; see Chapter 2). These different options often depend on the grade in which CCE is delivered, the extent to which it is mandatory at certain stages of the education systems, and the degree of autonomy schools have in designing their curricula.

Research on CCE curriculum organization has long shown that there is a great diversity in the formal provision of CCE across countries and has identified three main approaches (Council of Europe, 2004; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017; Schulz et al., 2010, 2018, 2025):

- CCE is a cross-curricular subject: CCE learning outcomes and contents are transversal across the curriculum, and all teachers have the responsibility to deliver them.
- CCE is integrated into other subjects: CCE learning outcomes and contents are taught within other curricular subjects, usually those related to human/social science. Other subject areas that can be involved to a smaller extent are related to languages, personal development, ethics, and religious studies. This integration

may imply the lack of a separate recognition/component of CCE within the main curricular subject.

- CCE is a separate subject: CCE learning outcomes and contents are clearly identified in the curriculum, as they are independent from the other subjects. Although this aspect confers a stronger recognition in the curriculum, it does not necessarily imply a CCE-dedicated teacher, a fixed time allocation, or a specific mark in the report card.

ICCS has repeatedly pointed out how these different approaches are not mutually exclusive but can coexist at the same time in national regulations and within a single school (Ainley et al., 2013; Schulz et al., 2010, 2018, 2025). For examples of the different ways CCE is delivered in schools across the educational systems, see Chapter 5.

According to Eurydice, the two most widespread approaches in Europe are integrating CCE into other subjects and delivering it as a cross-curricular area, with these two approaches often used in combination (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). The names used for CCE in the curriculum vary widely, reflecting different emphases, sometimes focusing on a single subject area or a combination of them (Textbox 1.7).

Textbox 1.7. Civic and Citizneship Education: one subject, different names

A Council of Europe study (2004) found that civic and citizenship education is taught under many different names across countries. These names often reflect the main focus of the subject:

- **Civics-focused**: for example, civic education, citizenship education, and civic culture.
- **Political education-focused**: for example, civic, social, and political education, democracy and human rights education, constitutional studies, and political education.
- **Social studies-focused**: for example, social sciences, living together, personal and social development, and social, personal, and health education.
- **Combined subjects**: for example, history and civic education, history and social studies, religious and moral education, history, civic education and economics, and civic education and ethics.

Source: Council of Europe, 2004.

1.4 Teachers' Role: CCE as a Shared Responsibility

CCE is complex, and rooted in active student participation, making teachers key actors in its delivery.

The presence or absence of a teacher specialized in CCE is one of the many aspects that characterize this area. According to the last Eurydice report, in European primary schools CCE is generally taught by generalist teachers responsible for multiple subjects (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). In contrast, in European secondary schools (both lower and upper secondary), CCE is mainly taught by teachers who are specialists in specific subjects. These subjects may include citizenship education itself (taught by a specialist teacher) or other related subjects such as history, political science, social science/sociology, and philosophy, particularly when CCE is integrated into subjects in the secondary-level curriculum. In the school systems where CCE is a cross-curricular area, all teachers share the responsibility to deliver it.

As a result, teachers can have different responsibilities within the diverse approaches, whether there is a CCE-specialist teacher or whether CCE is a cross-curricular subject (Schulz et al., 2023). If we consider the delivery of CCE as a whole, the role of teachers goes beyond the different approaches adopted at the country level and at school. As outlined in the previous paragraphs, the multidimensional nature of CCE and the influence of different contexts (inside and outside the school) make it an area that is intrinsically cross-curricular, with multiple opportunities to connect to the whole school curriculum. This is particularly true when looking at not only the acquisition of knowledge and understanding but also the fostering of values, attitudes, and engagement. Put simply, if the overall aim of teaching and schooling is to prepare students to be active citizens now and in the future, then every teacher plays a vital role in promoting civic knowledge, values, attitudes, and engagement.

The creation of democratic learning environments at school and in the classroom (Council of Europe, 2018), as addressed in the next chapter (Chapter 2), supports this approach, stressing the role all teachers have in fostering CCE's aims, regardless of the subject taught.

In Summary

Civic and citizenship education (CCE) is a complex field, with ongoing debates about its main features, goals, and the best way to teach it.

The *good citizen* is seen as a person who reflects on and engages in social and political issues, contributes to the good of society, and, when needed, expresses disagreement and protest for issues related to social justice.

The definition of CCE used in this publication was developed within the first IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) in 2009 and combines the knowledge of civic issues with active participation, focusing on the individual, the school,

and society as a whole.

CCE is broad and characterized by three interconnected dimensions:

- Knowledge and understanding
- Attitudes and values
- Engagement

These dimensions are activated together during CCE activities, even if one is emphasized more than another.

Students' development in CCE (knowledge, attitudes, and behavior) is shaped by both the school environment and learning experiences beyond the classroom.

CCE aims vary across education systems, based on each country's culture, traditions, and whether it is taught at the primary or secondary level.

Main approaches to CCE formal provision:

- CCE as a cross-curricular subject
- CCE integrated into other subjects
- CCE as a separate subject.

These can coexist within the same national system or even within one school.

Teachers' roles depend on the approach, for example, whether there is a CCE-specialized teacher or whether CCE is a cross-curricular subject.

At the same time, CCE is intrinsically cross-curricular and can connect to every subject in the curriculum. All teachers, regardless of the subject area, play a part in developing students' civic knowledge, values, attitudes, and engagement.

Reading Tips

Reference framework of competences for democratic culture. Volume 1: Context, concepts and model.
Author and year: Council of Europe (2018).
Link: https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/-/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture

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Author and year: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, (2017).
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Authors and year: Wolfram Schulz, John Ainley, Jullian Fraillon, Bruno Losito, Gabriella Agrusti, Valeria Damiani, and Tim Friedman (2025).
Link: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-65603-3

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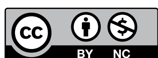

Chapter 2

Democratic Learning Environments for Civic and Citizenship Education

Valeria Damiani

Abstract

This chapter examines how schools and classrooms can act as real-world environments for democracy, giving students opportunities to experience democratic practices firsthand and strengthen civic and citizenship education (CCE). It begins by defining democratic learning environments (DLEs) and explains how these settings offer meaningful opportunities for fostering civic knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. The discussion is framed by the whole-school approach to CCE, focusing on four core features: open classroom climate, active and experiential learning, decision-making processes, and collaboration between schools and the community. The chapter investigates how these elements shape classroom discussions, deliberation, classroom organization, rules, students' ability to monitor their learning through formative assessments, and cooperative learning. It concludes with practical strategies for using experiential learning in local communities to further develop students' civic knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

Keywords

decision-making processes, democratic learning environment (DLE), formative assessment, open classroom climate, whole-school approach (WSA)

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, we explored how engagement is a core dimension of the civic and citizenship education (CCE) curriculum that can be nurtured through many different activities both inside and beyond the classroom. In CCE, engagement is not just about taking part in events and projects; it's about connecting students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and current or intended behaviors so that they feel confident to participate in civic life now and in the future (Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2011). We also emphasized the key role that different contexts (such as family, peers, classrooms and schools, the local community, and the wider society) play in the development of CCE. CCE should not be seen as something confined only to formal learning. Experiences gained in other contexts affect and shape the background and perspectives students bring into the classroom, and in turn, what they learn at school can influence how they engage in wider society (Barber et al., 2006).

CCE can be fostered in many ways—through teaching, through educational activities outside the formal school system, and through everyday experiences with different

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people and environments (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974; Haste, 2004; Maslowski, 2001). Nevertheless, the school is one of the most important environments where CCE can be enriched. It offers students real opportunities to experience citizenship in action by participating in the routines, decisions, and relationships that shape their daily lives (Lawy & Biesta, 2006). In this sense, schools and the classrooms act as microcosms of society, where students can participate effectively in a culture of democracy and practice civic engagement daily.

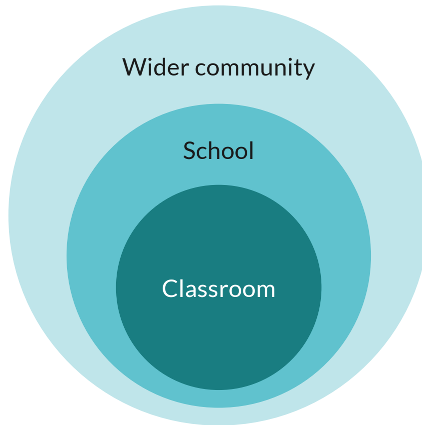
This chapter explores how schools and classrooms can provide students with practical experiences of democracy and strengthen CCE instruction, showing how schools can foster civic knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in the classroom and beyond. The chapter begins by defining democratic learning environments (DLEs) and outlines the key elements for building DLEs, using the whole-school approach (WSA) as a framework. Four key features of WSA are open classroom climate, active and experiential learning, decision-making processes, and collaboration between the school and the community. For each key feature, defining characteristics and practical implications are highlighted—from classroom discussions and decision-making processes at the classroom level to classroom organization and rules and opportunities for students to monitor their learning through formative assessment and cooperative learning. The chapter concludes with insights and guidance on experiential learning strategies in the local community to further develop students' civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

2.2 Democratic Learning Environments—The Whole-School Approach

The *learning environment* can be defined as the setting and conditions in which learning takes place and influences students' motivation and success. It is made up of psychological, social, cultural, and physical elements and represents the context in which students, teachers, and other school staff engage through their emotions and various interpersonal interactions (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2013; Rusticus et al., 2023). The learning environment is the setting where experiences and expectations are shaped collaboratively by everyone involved. While important aspects of the learning environment are determined at the school level, others can be determined at the central level through school policies (OECD, 2023).

In research, there is a consensus on the social, collective, and contextualized nature of the learning process (Engeström, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). Studies on learning ecologies and contexts have broadened the concept of the learning environment, moving beyond the classroom and immediate learning context to a holistic system that includes the school and the wider community. As such, learning environments can be viewed through an ecological systemic perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) (Fig. 2.1).

Figure 2.1 The learning environments

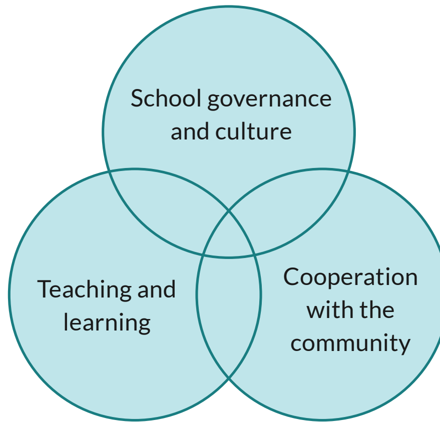


Within this ecological system framework, the school is often the first environment students experience outside the family and serves as a setting for practicing democracy, shaping young people's civic knowledge, attitudes, and engagement (Tzankova et al., 2021). Schools can be places where students learn how life in a democratic society works, commit themselves to civic engagement, and develop their political awareness and sense of social responsibility (Torney-Purta & Vermeer, 2004).

The idea of a *democratic school* is not new. As early as 1899, Dewey described the school as a microcosm of society, with one of the school's primary aims being to build active and engaged members of society. In 1916, he further emphasized schools as social learning environments where students can develop democratic knowledge, skills, and attitudes first in the classroom, then in the school and in the wider community—within open and safe contexts (Dewey, 1899, 1916). Experiencing democracy in schools can be considered the first step toward building a democratic society grounded in human rights (Council of Europe, 2018; Haraldstad et al., 2021).

Building DLEs at school and in the classroom goes beyond classroom teaching and touches on every aspect of school life. In this regard, the Council of Europe (2018) refers to the notion of the WSA to CCE, in which all elements of school life (i.e., teaching methods, curricula, school leadership and rules, interpersonal relationships, and extracurricular activities in the community) are shaped on democratic principles. The WSA allows the development of a safe and positive learning environment where democratic principles can be explored, practiced, and discussed. In this model, the WSA involves all members of the school community (i.e., teachers, students, school heads, parents, school administration, and local community members) in a shared effort of cooperation. It focuses on three interdependent and overlapping areas that form the three main pillars of the school's learning environment: teaching and learning (classroom level), school governance and culture (school level), and cooperation with the community (wider community level) (Fig. 2.2).

Figure 2.2 The three areas of the WSA



In this book, the focus is on two of these areas: teaching and learning, and cooperation with the community. However, it is important to note that the broader school context can contribute significantly in shaping a DLE (e.g., the overall climate, culture, or ethos; students' opportunities to participate in decision-making processes; and the style of school leadership).

2.2.1 School Climate and Culture

The concept of *school climate* has been widely discussed, yet no single, universally accepted definition has emerged. According to Homana et al. (2006), school climate "refers to the impressions, beliefs, and expectations held by members of the school community about their school as a learning environment, their associated behavior, and the symbols and institutions that represent the patterned expressions of the behavior" (p. 3).

School climate is often used interchangeably with the terms *culture* and *ethos* (Campbell, 2006; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997). It can encompass several interrelated aspects:

- Academic climate: how learning and teaching are promoted within the school, including through leadership, teaching and learning, and opportunities for professional development.
- Community: the quality of interpersonal relationships within the school and with parents, including respect for diversity and school engagement.
- Physical and emotional safety: fair rules and norms, as well as socio-emotional safety for all members.
- Institutional environment: organizational features of the school, such as building maintenance and infrastructure, accessibility and allocation of educational resources, and the processes for school improvement (Powell et al., 2015; Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2015).

School climate can encompass nearly every aspect of school life, from the quality of teaching and learning to relationships within the school community, the way the school is organized, and its institutional and structural features. It is a multidimensional concept that reflects the complexity of students' experiences at school.

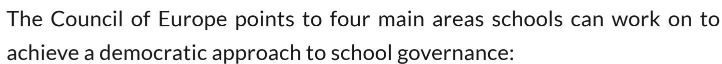
As school climate is shaped by individuals' perceptions, it may be experienced differently by the members of the school community. For example, a rule that seems unfair to one group may be perceived as fair by another (Barber et al., 2006).

A positive school climate improves youth development and learning. When students, families, teachers, and others in the school community feel engaged and respected, they are more likely to work together toward a shared vision for the school and to participate actively in its activities (Schweig et al., 2019). Such an environment can have a profound impact on many aspects of school life, including students' mental and physical health, motivation to learn, academic achievement, and overall well-being (Thapa et al., 2013).

2.2.2 School Governance

Adopting a democratic approach to school governance improves the relations between its members and fosters a climate of openness and trust in the school. The Council of Europe (2018) identified four main aspects that contribute to building a democratic organizational culture, where all people in the school community play an active role in how the school is managed (Textbox 2.1).

Textbox 2.1 A democratic approach to school governance



The Council of Europe points to four main areas schools can work on to achieve a democratic approach to school governance:

1. **Leadership and school management**. This involves the creation of spaces for collaborative decision-making and the equal treatment of all stakeholders. It also refers to the active involvement of all stakeholders in the running of the school, for example, through school planning and evaluation processes.
2. **Decision-making through representative bodies (e.g., school boards) and consultation.** This relates to putting systems in place so that teachers, students, and parents can actively help shape school policies and priorities.
3. **Policy, rules, and procedures.** These should reflect democratic values and principles, such as equality and inclusion. School rules should also include clear, participatory processes for resolving conflicts.

4. **Student participation.** This involves providing students with opportunities to express their opinions on issues that are relevant for them (related to the school but not limited to that) through discussion. Student participation can be achieved through student councils, surveys, suggestion boxes, and school assemblies. Participation should follow clear rules and conditions, emphasizing authentic involvement and the responsibility students take on when contributing to decision-making.

Source: Council of Europe, 2018.

2.2.3 Making Learning Environments Democratic

DLEs can be developed through a holistic approach, as the WSA suggests, that connects classroom management, shared decision-making processes, respect in communications, and a common commitment to civic-related teaching and learning. According to the WSA, civic learning should go beyond simple classroom instruction and can be experienced firsthand through the environments in which the learning occurs. This is particularly relevant for CCE, where the choice of teaching methods and the design of learning environments directly influence its content and aims. In other words, citizenship learning is deeply connected to the contexts in which it takes place and to the processes it activates. This connection extends beyond the school itself to out-of-school experiences within the local community, which offers further opportunities to learn and practice democracy.

In CCE, the learning environment itself forms part of the message, namely, civic learning. Students learn about democracy not only through the content of the lessons but also through the examples set by teachers and by the wider school community, as well as through the way their classroom and school experiences are organized. Building DLEs ensures the message and the medium are aligned, reinforcing one another (Brett et al., 2009; Council of Europe, 2018).

The construction of DLEs directly relates to CCE, but its benefits stretch beyond this subject. All subjects in the curriculum can thrive from DLEs. In the next section, DLE's main features are explored, addressing the following areas:

- Classroom climate
- Active and experiential learning
- Democratic processes in the classroom
- School-community cooperation

2.3 Classroom Climate

School climate refers to the overall school environment, whereas *classroom climate* refers to the instructional environment in which most students and teachers operate and interact daily (in terms of student-teacher or student-student interactions) (Schweig et al., 2019).

Identifying the specific features of classroom climate in schools is not an easy task. The concept itself is multidimensional, encompassing a range of interdependent factors that are constantly evolving and experienced differently by each individual. Students and teachers bring their own diverse life experiences and are influenced differently by social and cultural beliefs of their peers, family, and the wider society. Their interactions with fellow students, the faculty, and the staff develop and change over time (Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2011). This creates an ongoing, iterative loop between the individuals and the learning context (Freedman et al., 2016). From this perspective, a single school can be home to diverse classroom climates that differ from one classroom to another (Creemers, 1994).

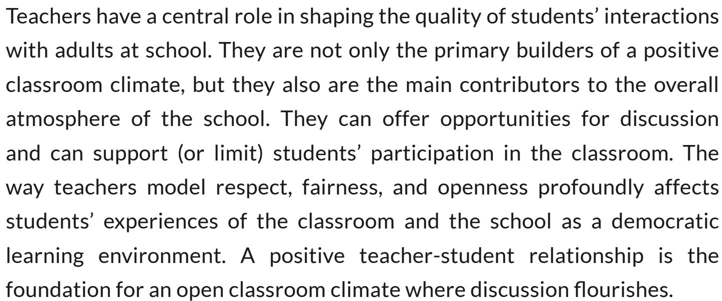
Classroom and school climate are characterized by many common key features: interpersonal relationships, a sense of safety (emotional as well as physical), the sense of a community, the pedagogical climate (i.e., teachers' classroom organization and relationships between students and teachers or among students), students' participation in decision-making, perceptions of equity, respect, openness for discussion, and a sense of belonging (Berkowitz et al., 2017).

Although school and classroom climate share overlapping aspects, classroom climate can be distinguished by several specific features (Barr, 2016; Schweig et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020):

- Academic climate: the learning expectations and activities, including the content, organization, and clarity of class activities, as well as teaching practices.
- Safety: the physical setting of the classroom, the cohesiveness of the group, and the quality of interpersonal relationships (e.g., students and teachers being friendly and supportive), alongside the fairness and consistency of classroom rules.
- Engagement: the extent to which students actively participate in class.
- Institutional environment: the physical conditions of the classroom, class size, and the availability of resources (e.g., textbooks or ICT facilities).

Classroom climate is fundamentally interpersonal in nature; at its core lie interactive relationships, the interest in students' ideas, students' participation, and instructional support (Frisby & Martin, 2010) (Textbox 2.2).

Textbox 2.2 The role of teachers in building an open classroom climate



Teachers have a central role in shaping the quality of students' interactions with adults at school. They are not only the primary builders of a positive classroom climate, but they also are the main contributors to the overall atmosphere of the school. They can offer opportunities for discussion and can support (or limit) students' participation in the classroom. The way teachers model respect, fairness, and openness profoundly affects students' experiences of the classroom and the school as a democratic learning environment. A positive teacher-student relationship is the foundation for an open classroom climate where discussion flourishes.

(See Chapter 4, Section 4.2 for examples on how to create a positive classroom climate.)

Source: Maurissen et al., 2018; Tzankova et al., 2021.

In DLEs, the classroom climate is characterized by its openness and positive and supportive relationships. It can be intended as "a climate in which learners are able to raise issues that are of concern to them, are allowed to discuss controversial issues, are encouraged to express their own opinions and to listen to one another and are allowed to explore a variety of different perspectives" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 117).

A positive and open classroom climate is essential to nurturing discussions where students can share and debate different—and sometimes conflicting—opinions (Campbell, 2019). It allows democratic and liberal values to be developed in the classroom (Ehman, 1980; Hahn, 1999; Schulz et al., 2025) and ensures that the classroom is a safe space where students are involved in the drafting and respecting of the basic rules, such as listening to and respecting others (Council of Europe, 2018).

In this environment, students are more motivated to learn and better equipped to engage in authentic and meaningful civic-related activities. Research consistently shows a strong link between teaching methods used to encourage discussion, dialogue, and participation and the overall classroom climate in which these activities occur. An open and respectful classroom climate provides the foundation for effective, quality classroom discussions and debates on civic issues, including controversial topics (Geboers et al., 2013; Hahn, 1996) and is associated with positive attitudes towards several civic-related issues, such as gender equality and immigrants' rights (Flanagan et al., 2010; Geboers et al., 2013; Hess & McAvoy, 2014; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Myoung & Liou, 2025).

The Openness of Classroom Climate for Discussion scale, first developed by Ehman (1969), has been adapted and applied in all International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) civic education studies since the 1970s. Recognized as a key factor in fostering students' civic knowledge and engagement, this scale is explored further in Chapter 3.

2.3.1 Classroom Discussions

Well-structured class discussions can significantly enhance students' civic-related knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values—helping to build trust in civic institutions and encouraging electoral and political participation (Campbell, 2008; Geboers et al., 2013; Lenzi et al., 2014).

Deliberative processes (e.g., where all participants contribute to examining an issue before making informed decisions) are particularly important for practicing democracy in the classroom (Textbox 2.3). These processes create opportunities to collaboratively discuss specific arguments and make informed decisions. Through deliberation, students can reflect on alternative points of view, critically analyze their preconceptions and opinions, and move beyond individual interests (Jacobs et al., 2009). Deliberative processes allow students to think about civic issues and diversity. This can foster the development of critical awareness and debating skills because students require these

Textbox 2.3 Implementing fruitful discussions in a classroom

- **Connect to students' lives**: Topics should relate to learners' experiences, interests, and current events.
- **Using varied materials:** Topics can be introduced through videos, photos, or real-world examples to spark curiosity.
- **Clarify objectives**: The aims and topics of the discussion should be clearly defined and communicated in advance so that students understand their purpose.
- **Set up the space:** The physical layout of the classroom should encourage interaction and collaboration, allowing students to engage with different peers.
- **Build shared ground rules**: Rules for taking turns and listening should be developed collaboratively with students and reinforced regularly.
- **Encourage student participation:** Sufficient opportunities should be provided for students to express their ideas, while teacher talk should remain limited.

Examples of debate and class discussions are provided in the Slovenian example in Chapter 5.

Source: Brett et al., 2009.

skills to speak in public, listen respectfully, and express their opinions (Hess, 2009; Maurissen et al., 2018).

2.4 Active and Experiential Learning

According to Dewey's (1916) idea of *democratic education*, individual growth is not a pathway to democratic citizenship but rather a continuous and shared experience through which democratic habits are cultivated.

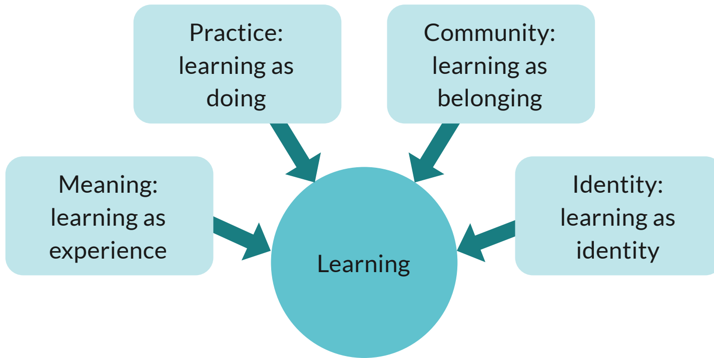
The concept of *individual growth* is closely tied to purposeful experience—through active engagement in the community, learners develop as democratic individuals—and to constructed learning, gained through the freedom to explore within the schooling experience and the curriculum (Dewey, 1916). The Deweyan idea of democratic education sees students working with teachers in a democratic space to explore common concerns, share common interests, and, more generally, create and discuss the curriculum (Collins et al., 2019).

Experiential and participatory practices (both inside and outside of school) are thus crucial for citizenship learning (Haste, 2004). These practices help reimagine and reshape classroom and school contexts as spaces where collaboration is central and where learning takes place through active social participation in different communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Viewing classrooms and schools as communities of practice means placing the social participation of teachers and students at the heart of learning, with the acquisition of civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes following on from that engagement (Textbox 2.4). This perspective has several implications for creating DLEs in the classroom, including:

- Learning occurs through relationships and interactions, making a positive and open classroom climate essential.
- The classroom serves as the primary setting where learning is negotiated and experienced.
- Collaborative approaches and participation are crucial for the acquisition of learning.
- Students are viewed as active agents in the learning process, with a strong sense of membership and belonging.
- The teacher acts as a role model, consistently demonstrating the democratic knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes they aim to develop in their students. This is closely linked to how citizenship is implicitly transmitted through teachers' communication and actions and the hidden curriculum.
- The teacher also serves as the supervisor and the coordinator of all classroom activities, setting boundaries and monitoring processes (Hoskins et al., 2012; Jewson, 2007).

Textbox 2.4 Community of practice

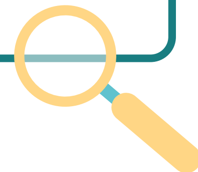
The concept of *community of practice* considers learning as not limited within the individual but as a social process situated in a cultural and historical context. The figure below shows the four components that constitute the conceptual framework for Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning (communities of practice).



Source: Wenger, 1998.

According to Wenger's conception, learning occurs through mutual and meaningful activities within multiple communities of practice, from workplaces to social groups, families, and schools.

This connects with the Octagon Model presented in Chapter 1 (Fig. 1.1), which illustrates that students belong to and interact with diverse communities that shape their civic identities. Wenger's theory presents a valuable framework for examining how students at school engage in learning as a social practice, through participation and the shared construction of meaning.



Sources: Farnsworth et al., 2016; Hoskins et al., 2012; Wenger, 1998.

In a classroom intended as a DLE, active and experiential learning should be linked to pedagogical approaches and methods that engage students in experiencing, analyzing, reflecting, and collaborating with peers and teachers. Active and experiential CCE learning implies approaches centered both on the learning process and on the outcomes of teaching. In the classroom, teachers act as facilitators of both learning and experiencing democracy, offering students specific opportunities that form a

continuum—from directly experiencing a civic-related aspect to actively engaging in civic life. This continuum includes the following steps (Council of Europe, 2018):

1. **Making direct experiences about civic-related issues.** This can happen in real or imagined settings and can support students in developing their civic knowledge, attitudes, and skills through practice that is meaningful for them. These experiences may encompass research, case studies, games, the use of the media, activities in the wider community, the organization of events, interaction with other schools (face-to-face or online), etc.
2. **Comparing different opinions and viewpoints.** This involves exposing students to what may feel "diverse" or "unfamiliar" and encouraging them to analyze these perspectives. The goal here is to move beyond comparison based on preconceptions or common sense toward comparison that fosters deeper understanding—without judgment and with effort to adopt the perspective of others. "The conscious comparison" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 28) helps students become aware of how they construct their reality.
3. **Analyzing what lies behind opinions, values, and practices.** This requires students to explore the causes and the implications of these positions. Teachers, in their role as facilitators, can support this process through discussions, inquiry-based methods, and guided reflection.
4. **Reflecting to promote critical awareness and understanding.** Students need dedicated time and space to reflect on experiences, comparisons, and analyses they have undertaken. Teachers should carefully plan these moments for reflection, offering learners specific tools that can help them process what they have learned and make connections to broader civic issues (e.g., reflective journals, writing exercises, or mind maps, etc.).
5. **Taking action.** The previous steps—experience, comparison, analysis, and reflection—form the foundation for students to move into action, both individually and collectively. This action can take place in the classroom, within the school, or in the wider community. Teachers can play a key role by encouraging student initiative, supporting their ideas, and helping them organize meaningful activities that translate learning into civic engagement.

These learning opportunities can be offered to students through the different CCE approaches that can be implemented at school, for example, as a separate, integrated, or cross-curricular area (see Chapter 1). This means that promoting DLEs is not a task limited to those teaching CCE but can be implemented by all teachers regardless of the subject they teach. Practical teaching strategies and examples of active, experiential learning to support the goal are presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

2.5 Introducing Democratic Processes in the Classroom: Enhancing Students' Participation

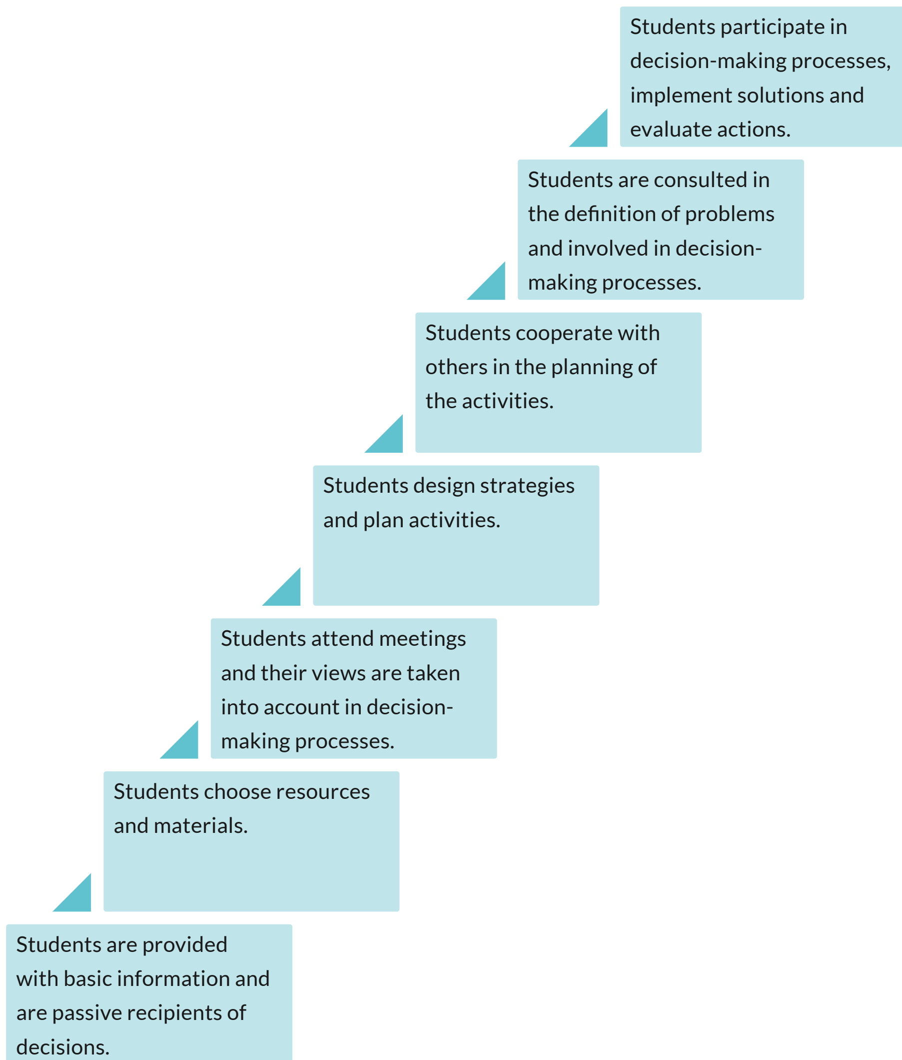
Participation, a key element of the democratic process, is not limited to the political sphere but can take place in everyday life and in all kinds of social contexts. Democracy can be learned, and schools provide a key context for this learning when they are characterized by the principles of equality, justice, and fairness and adopt structures and processes that promote shared governance and taking responsibility. Preparing students for their roles as present and future citizens requires not only the development of participatory structures and processes but also the creation of contexts where students can experience trust, belonging, and responsibility. Experiencing democratic processes in the classroom can serve as an essential first step to empowering students to actively engage in their communities and in society (Huddleston, 2007, 2014).

Several studies have analyzed the benefits of students' participation at school, including enhanced motivation and engagement, positive student-teacher relationships (Mitra, 2004; Rudduck & Flutter, 2007), increased self-efficacy, problem-solving skills, and cooperative behaviors (Fielding, 2011).

A systematic literature review on students' co-creation and decision-making activities in the context of teaching and learning showed that students increased not only their skills, such as inquiry, critical thinking, and negotiating, but also their sense of confidence, ownership, and empowerment (Geurts et al., 2024).

Student participation challenges traditional views of power and the balance of responsibility between adults and young people. It can take many forms depending on the diverse bodies and processes in place (Mager & Nowak, 2012). A common way to represent structures of power is through a ladder, where each step represents increasing degrees of student power and different forms of cooperation between students and adults (Hart, 1992; Jensen & Simovska, 2005; Shier, 2001). In his "ladder of participation," Dürr (2005, p. 33) describes seven levels of participation, ranging from basic access to information to full involvement in decision-making processes (Fig. 2.3). These levels should not be seen as a hierarchy where a higher level is always better; rather, it is important that students benefit from experiencing a range of different levels of participation opportunities.

Figure 2.3 Seven levels of students' participation (modified from Dürr, 2005)



Source: Modified from Dürr, 2005.

Although teachers may face many obstacles in fostering student participation, such as rigid classroom structures, inflexible school organization, limited time for non-instructional activities, top-down decision-making, or insufficient collaboration with colleagues and staff (Council of Europe, 2009), there are still several strategies they can adopt to strengthen students' decision-making processes.

Teachers can involve students in a wide range of decisions—whether connected to the aims and content of instruction or to the processes and outcomes of learning. For example, they can invite students to help decide which topics are most relevant to them, how learning should be assessed, or how learning can be structured and implemented through classroom activities (Müller-Kuhn et al., 2021).

In this section, we explore some of the key democratic processes that teachers can bring into classroom practice through shared decision-making, namely:

- Classroom organization and rules
- Students' participation in their own learning
- Cooperative learning

IEA's International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) includes several questions related to students' involvement in classroom activities and their perceptions of openness in classroom discussions (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4).

2.5.1 Classroom Organization and Rules

In a DLE, students can have their say in aspects that shape their daily classroom (and school) experience. They can, for example, contribute to decisions about the way the classroom is organized, such as where and with whom to sit, how to structure the daily or weekly class agenda, whether to work in pairs or in teams, what is displayed on the walls, or how break times are arranged. These kinds of organizational choices and rules can be discussed collectively in class meetings or in classroom councils (Textbox 2.5).

Textbox 2.5 Class meetings and class councils

Teachers can organize classroom meetings for a wide range of goals, from fostering a positive classroom climate to solving specific problems that occurred in the class (e.g., scheduling, use of resources, group work challenges, etc.) or proposing new activities inside or outside the school.

When organizing a class meeting, teachers can:

- Arrange the class so that it is easier to communicate (e.g., students can sit in a circle).
- Set ground rules for communication (e.g., one person speaks at a time, while others listen without interrupting or engaging in other activities).
- Control the length of the meeting which should be appropriate for the age of the students.

During these meetings, teachers do not have to judge students' opinions but should step in to guide the discussion when needed. Meetings can be organized regularly or be called when specific issues occur.

Class councils are bodies that are institutionalized, often with a written constitution that determines their main characteristics and basic rules within the classroom. Students can undertake specific roles and functions, such as the president, the vice-president, the chair, etc. As class meetings, they can be held regularly and tackle the different issues that occur at the classroom level.

One of the most effective and practical ways teachers can give students a voice in the classroom is by co-developing classroom rules or behavioral guidelines with them (Textbox 2.6). Furthermore this can enhance their relationship with students. There are many ways teachers can work with their students to co-create classroom rules. Below you will find some basics steps that can be undertaken (Alter & Haydon, 2017; Erwin, 2004; Jones & Jones, 2016).

Textbox 2.6 Co-creating classroom rules with students

1. **Start with students' experiences.** Teachers can begin by discussing with students their expectations about classroom behavior and the challenges that they face in class (and at school).
2. **Explore desired behaviors.** Students discuss in pairs, small groups, or as a class the kind of behaviors they would like and not like to have in the classroom.
3. **Develop clear, positive rules.** Teachers and students work together to develop a set of classroom expectations. These should reflect both students' and teachers' perspectives (e.g., how would I expect to be treated by my peers and by the teacher? how would I expect to be treated by my students?). Each rule should be tied to positive and negative consequences. The agreed list can be written down and displayed in the classroom.
4. **Secure students' commitment.** Each student commits to following the agreed rules, either verbally or in writing. If written, students can sign a collective agreement to reinforce shared responsibility. The document can then be displayed in the classroom as a visible point of reference for the whole class.
5. **Monitor and review classroom rules.** Rules should be revisited regularly, especially when a new student joins the class or when a rule is broken.

Teachers can also work with the students to define "rules for teachers," acknowledging the teacher's responsibilities and authority while modeling mutual respect.

2.5.2 Students Play an Active Role in Their Learning Experience

By introducing shared decision-making processes in the classroom, teachers can encourage student participation. This includes involving students in key decisions about their learning, such as helping to plan the curriculum. Putting students at the center of the learning process means trusting their ability to take responsibility for their own learning. Within the school experience, *responsible citizens* are responsible for their learning (Council of Europe, 2009, 2018). This aspect lies at the heart of CCE but also extends beyond it, as all school subjects can use and benefit from fostering students' active participation in their own learning. Teachers can provide meaningful opportunities for students to participate in their own learning and to be involved in the teaching process. The following section focuses on two key strategies: co-planning of learning activities and providing opportunities for students to monitor their own learning.

Planning Civic Activities With the Learners

Students can take an active role in choosing their learning content or the issues to address in a project. Their interests are particularly valuable in the planning of CCE activities, where teachers can ask them about the issues that matter to them most. This approach is central to fostering civic engagement, as students directly experience, discuss, and analyze what concerns them and are therefore motivated to take action. (Council of Europe, 2018). Discussing which civic-related issue to address also provides a double benefit: it strengthens students' deliberation skills while ensuring the learning opportunities are meaningful and engaging.

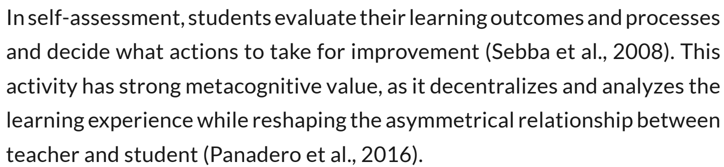
Creating Opportunities for Students to Monitor Their Own Learning

Teachers can encourage students' involvement in teaching and learning through differentiated strategies that allow them to monitor their learning (before, during, and after instruction). These include the use of formative assessment and other related strategies such as peer assessment and self-assessment (Textbox 2.7). These strategies represent valuable opportunities for discussion and active reflection, where students become protagonists of their learning under the supervision of the teacher. Their overall aim is to help students learn to manage their own learning by focusing and reflecting on the process and progression of the task or activity they are learning (Textbox 2.8).

Formative assessment is an essential part of the educational process, and many studies confirm its effectiveness in strengthening students' learning and academic performance (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; McCallum & Milner, 2020; Morris et al., 2021).

When used to promote self-regulated learning, formative assessment can significantly enhance metacognition—the ability to reflect on, evaluate, and control cognitive processes such as decision-making, memory, and perception (Katyal & Fleming, 2024). Through self-assessment, reflection, and analysis of their learning, students gain greater awareness of their strengths, weaknesses, and effective learning strategies. This helps them become more responsible and independent learners (Brady & Forest 2018).

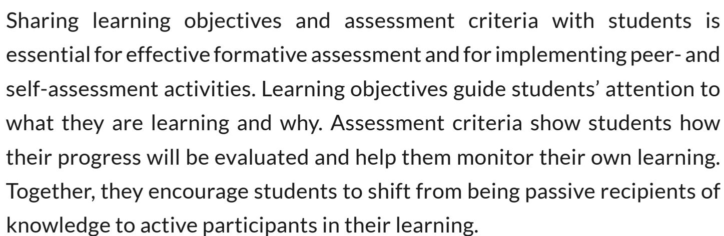
Textbox 2.7 Self-assessment and peer assessment



In self-assessment, students evaluate their learning outcomes and processes and decide what actions to take for improvement (Sebba et al., 2008). This activity has strong metacognitive value, as it decentralizes and analyzes the learning experience while reshaping the asymmetrical relationship between teacher and student (Panadero et al., 2016).

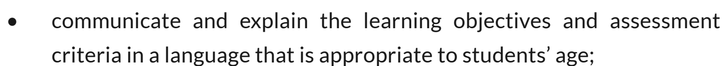
Peer assessment involves students evaluating the quality or value of a peer's product or performance, providing detailed feedback, and discussing their judgements with classmates to reach an agreed and negotiated outcome (Topping, 2017). Peer assessment helps students to develop metacognitive, communication, observation, and self-critical skills (Tillema et al., 2011).

Textbox 2.8 Sharing learning objectives and assessment criteria



Sharing learning objectives and assessment criteria with students is essential for effective formative assessment and for implementing peer- and self-assessment activities. Learning objectives guide students' attention to what they are learning and why. Assessment criteria show students how their progress will be evaluated and help them monitor their own learning. Together, they encourage students to shift from being passive recipients of knowledge to active participants in their learning.

For these activities to be effective, teachers should:



- communicate and explain the learning objectives and assessment criteria in a language that is appropriate to students' age;

- train students to compare their current level of performance with objectives and assessment criteria; and
- involve students in planning actions to close the gap in their learning (Sadler, 1989).

Equally important is creating time for discussion and reflection on the meaning of the learning objectives and assessment criteria. Teachers may also co-construct assessment criteria with the students, further strengthening ownership and engagement.

Assessment plays a central role in students' school experience. In DLEs, assessment should be fair and transparent.

Assessment is *fair* when:

- Teachers use the same criteria for assessment for all students who, as a group, should be considered as equal according to their status, regardless of other differences that are not connected directly to the educational process.
- It is not used by teachers for enforcing discipline.
- Teachers develop and apply the same standards for their judgements and criteria for assessment, and this practice is embedded at the school level.

Assessment is *transparent* when teachers:

- Explain to students what is expected and the assessment criteria.
- Explain to students the results of the assessment and why and how they have formed their judgements.
- Encourage students to ask for clarification of their results and of the criteria used for the assessment and involve them in the process of assessment whenever it is appropriate (Bîrzea et al., 2005).

2.6 Cooperative Learning

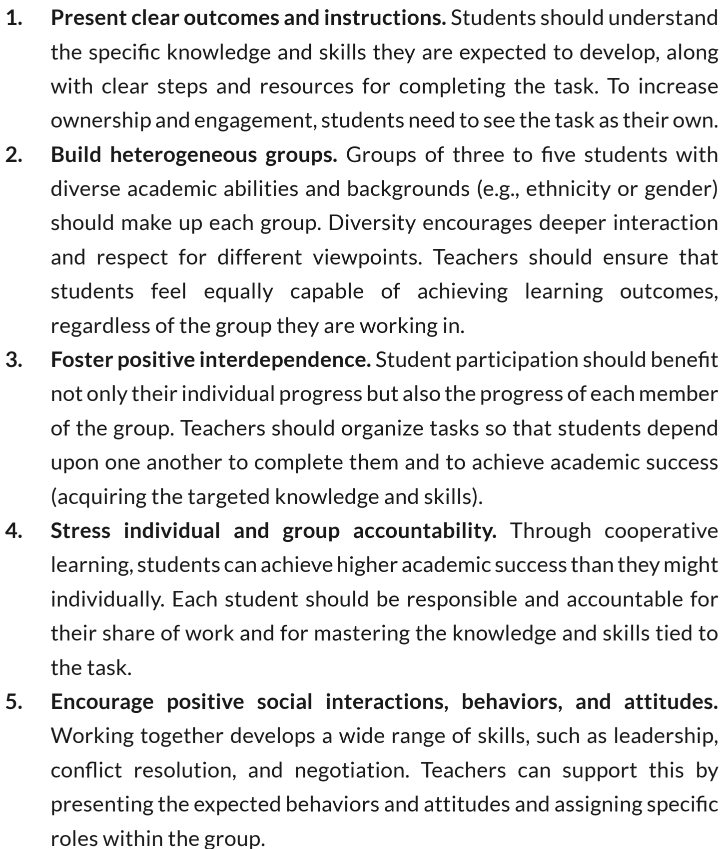
Cooperative learning principles aim to engage students actively in the learning process through inquiry and discussion with their peers in small groups. The group work is carefully organized and structured to promote the participation and learning of all group members in a shared cooperative task (Kagan, 1992).

By applying cooperative learning principles, teachers remove hierarchical and judgmental systems, allowing students to work and learn together to achieve a common goal in a supportive and active way. Classroom cooperation helps students develop a range of skills, including respect, conflict resolution, problem-solving, and leadership. Learning to cooperate in the classroom also serves as the foundation for building and experiencing social cohesion in the wider society (Council of Europe, 2018).

Cooperative learning goes beyond making students work together in small groups (Textbox 2.9). One of the main features that distinguishes cooperative learning from other group activities is the emphasis on academic learning success for each individual and all members of the group (Slavin, 1991).

Studies on cooperative learning show that it fosters students' achievement, encourages positive peer relationships, improves problem-solving, conflict-resolution and communicative skills, and boosts students' self-motivation and self-esteem (Amin, 2020; Fernández-Espínola et al., 2020; Gillies, 2016; Roseth et al., 2008).

Textbox 2.9 Key principles for effective cooperative learning



1. **Present clear outcomes and instructions.** Students should understand the specific knowledge and skills they are expected to develop, along with clear steps and resources for completing the task. To increase ownership and engagement, students need to see the task as their own.
2. **Build heterogeneous groups.** Groups of three to five students with diverse academic abilities and backgrounds (e.g., ethnicity or gender) should make up each group. Diversity encourages deeper interaction and respect for different viewpoints. Teachers should ensure that students feel equally capable of achieving learning outcomes, regardless of the group they are working in.
3. **Foster positive interdependence.** Student participation should benefit not only their individual progress but also the progress of each member of the group. Teachers should organize tasks so that students depend upon one another to complete them and to achieve academic success (acquiring the targeted knowledge and skills).
4. **Stress individual and group accountability.** Through cooperative learning, students can achieve higher academic success than they might individually. Each student should be responsible and accountable for their share of work and for mastering the knowledge and skills tied to the task.
5. **Encourage positive social interactions, behaviors, and attitudes.** Working together develops a wide range of skills, such as leadership, conflict resolution, and negotiation. Teachers can support this by presenting the expected behaviors and attitudes and assigning specific roles within the group.

6. **Promote reflection after group task completion.** Students should reflect on how they have worked together as a team, including whether they met their learning outcomes, how they supported one another, and what behaviors and attitudes contributed to success. Reflection should also highlight what can be improved for a more successful group task in the future. Although not every aspect needs to be addressed in every reflection session, these principles are essential for achieving meaningful and lasting outcomes through cooperative learning.

Source: Stahl, 1994.

2.7 School-Community Cooperation

Cooperation with the local community can provide students with meaningful opportunities to experience citizenship firsthand, connecting what they have learned at school with contemporary, real-life issues that shape society (Hedtke & Zimenkova, 2013).

Active and experiential learning strategies inside and outside the school are particularly effective in developing students' civic-related knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Billig et al., 2005; Henderson et al., 2013). When students take part in community activities, such as volunteering or service learning, they are provided with opportunities to reflect on their relationship with the wider society and the different roles they may play in it (Torney-Purta & Barber, 2004). Such experiences can also help students recognize social or political issues, discuss and reflect on them with peers and adults, and work collaboratively to identify possible solutions (McFarland & Thomas, 2006).

For these activities to fully contribute to CCE, they should be formally embedded into the CCE curriculum. This is not simply about adding extracurricular or out-of-school activities. It is about connecting what students learn and experience in school with what they can learn and experience out of school (Textbox 2.10). Aligning curricular content and learning outcomes with knowledge and skills gained through community cooperation creates a continuum of learning that bridges school and society. In this view, school-community cooperation becomes an integral part of CCE learning and practice.

Textbox 2.10 Options for teachers and school cooperation with the community

1. **Partnering with external organizations.** Nongovernmental organizations, youth organizations, or advocacy groups promoting human rights can provide students with opportunities to understand and engage in issues they care about. These partnerships can support projects, offer

training, and bring experts into the school to share their knowledge.

2. **Collaborating with local authorities.** Partnerships with local municipalities or youth councils, when available, allow students to understand and engage with formal governance structures, strengthening the reciprocal role between local authorities and students.
3. **Building networks with other schools**. Creating partnerships with other schools enables the sharing of experiences and resources. These networks facilitate meaningful interactions among students and promote the exchange of perspectives and opportunities to discuss issues that are of mutual concern. School partnerships can be organized within the same country or with schools in other countries, providing opportunities to explore different cultural and social perspectives.
4. **Involving parents.** Parents can play an important role in civic and citizenship education (CCE) by sharing their expertise, knowledge, and experience in a wide range of CCE-related fields (e.g., health and law) (Council of Europe, 2018).

See Chapter 5 for an example from Italy on how to involve the local community in a CCE-related initiative.

IEA's International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) has included, since the first round in 2009, a question asking principals and teachers about their students' opportunities to participate in activities with external organizations. See Chapter 3 for further findings.

Source: Brett et al., 2009.

2.8 Concluding Remarks

Introducing DLEs means shifting from a teacher-centered to a student-centered classroom, where students gain more autonomy. It also opens up the school to the wider community. Although this shift is considered positive in theory, everyday practice highlights that it can be daunting, both for new teachers entering the profession and for experienced ones.

Transitioning from a teacher-led classroom to one where students play an active and responsible role in their learning and class organization is a long and challenging process. This requires a shift in classroom management and interactions, as control and responsibility for learning are shared between students and teachers. In this model, teachers become learning facilitators and social mediators (Council of Europe, 2018).

Introducing democratic elements into classroom practice requires teachers to first strengthen students' sense of responsibility. This responsibility complements the

autonomy and power gained through their new roles. Responsibility is key to the development of DLEs both at the classroom and school levels, fostering a sense of belonging to the school community and a commitment to shared needs. Responsibility is not limited to students; every member of the school community has the responsibility to make schools supportive and effective places for learning.

Another key element to building DLEs is trust (Bäckman & Trafford, 2007). This includes trust in students' ability to be responsible learners, trust in teachers' ability to be effective in situations where students have greater autonomy, and trust in the value of learning within shared and co-constructed rules. Reinforcing trust is therefore both a precondition and a cornerstone for developing DLEs both at school and classroom levels.

In Summary

School is one of the first environments students experience outside the family and represents a context for the practice of democracy daily and firsthand, where students understand how living in a democratic society works, commit themselves to civic engagement, and develop their political awareness and social responsibility.

Building democratic learning environments (DLEs) at school involves all aspects of school experience. According to the whole-school approach (WSA) to civic and citizenship education, all the features of school life (i.e., teaching methods, curricula, school leadership and rules, interpersonal relationships and extracurricular activities in the community, and decision-making processes) should reflect democratic principles.

The WSA can be fostered by working on three interdependent and overlapping areas:

- teaching and learning (classroom level);
- school governance and culture (school level); and
- cooperation with the community (wider community level).

The main features of a DLE at the classroom and community level are:

1. **Classroom climate.** A DLE is characterized by open, positive, and supportive relationships. Such climates enable learners to raise issues that are of concern to them, discuss controversial issues, express their own opinions and listen to one another, exploring different perspectives.
2. **Active and experiential learning.** This involves pedagogical approaches and methods that actively engage students in experiencing, analyzing, reflecting on, and cooperating (both among peers and between students and the teacher) civic-related issues. Teachers act as facilitators of student's experiences in learning about and participating in democracy.
3. **Democratic processes in the classroom.** Experiencing democratic processes in the classroom can be a first step toward empowering students to actively participate

in the community and in society. This can happen through the co-organization of the classroom setting and rules, the shared planning of civic activities between the teacher and the students, the use of formative assessment, and, more generally, fair and transparent assessment.

4. **Cooperative learning.** This aims to engage students actively in the learning process through inquiry and discussion with their peers in small groups to accomplish a common goal.
5. **School-community cooperation.** Working with the local community provides students with meaningful opportunities to experience citizenship in practice, connecting what they have learned at school with contemporary, real-life issues that characterize our societies.

Reading Tips

Democratic governance of schools.
Authors and year: Elisabeth Bäckman and Bernard Trafford (2007).
Link: https://theewc.org/resources/democratic-governance-of-schools/

Tool for Quality assurance of education for democratic citizenship in schools.
Authors and year: Cezar Bîrzea, Michela Cecchini, Cameron Harrison, Janez Krek, and Vedrana Spajić-Vrkas (2005).
Link: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000140827

Reference framework of competences for democratic culture. Volume 3: Guidance for implementation.
Author and year: Council of Europe (2018).
Link: https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture/rfcdc-volumes

Assessing school citizenship education climate: Implications for the social studies (CIRCLE Working Paper 48).
Authors and year: Gary Homana, Carolyn Barber, and Judith Torney-Purta (2006).
Link: https://circle.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/2019-12/WP48_SchoolCitizenshipImplicationsfortheSocialStudies_2006.pdf

From student voice to shared responsibility. Effective practice in democratic school governance in European schools.
Author and year: Ted Huddleston (2007).
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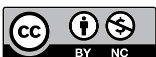

Chapter 3

IEA Civic Education Studies and the Development of Democratic Learning Environments

Bruno Losito

Abstract

This chapter examines the contribution of International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) studies—particularly the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS)—to the development of democratic learning environments. It also highlights how ICCS has deepened knowledge and understanding of the importance of fostering such environments for students' civic learning and engagement. The opening section introduces the main aims and characteristics of ICCS. Subsequent sections draw on data from the student, school, and teacher questionnaires to illustrate how ICCS informs the creation of democratic learning environments. Key areas addressed include openness of classroom climate, student participation in classroom activities, diversity-related activities, teaching and learning strategies, civic-related practices in the local community, and collaboration between schools and the local community. This chapter also provides practical suggestions for teachers on how to address these topics with their students, both at the classroom and whole-school levels. Finally, the chapter highlights how the development of democratic learning environments is linked to students' civic knowledge and their engagement in democratic life.

Keywords

democratic learning environments, diversity-related practices, International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), openness of classroom climate, school-community relationships, teaching and learning practices

3.1 Introduction

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) has a long history of research on civic and citizenship education. Early work began with the Six Subject Study in the 1970s (Torney et al., 1975), followed by the Civic Education Study (CIVED) in 1999 (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) has since continued this tradition, with cycles in 2009, 2016, and 2022, and a fourth cycle planned for 2027.

This chapter highlights the main aims and findings of these studies, focusing on how they contribute to the development of democratic learning environments. These

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environments are key to fostering students' civic knowledge and supporting their democratic attitudes and engagement. Examples from the ICCS school, teacher, and student questionnaires are also included, offering practical tools for teachers to strengthen learning environments and reflect on their own classroom practices.

3.2 Main Aims and Characteristics of ICCS

Building on earlier IEA studies, ICCS investigates how young people are prepared for their roles as citizens across a wide range of countries.

The study addresses questions about students' civic knowledge, their willingness to engage with civic and citizenship-related issues, and their attitudes toward these topics (Schulz et al., 2008, 2010, 2016, 2018, 2023, 2025). It also examines the different contexts (from the national level to school and classroom contexts) where such knowledge and attitudes develop (Textbox 3.1).

Textbox 3.1 Examples of ICCS research questions

How is civic and citizenship education implemented in participating countries?
The question explores:

- the aims and principles of civic and citizenship education;
- the curricular approaches used in different countries; and
- how the role of civic and citizenship education is perceived across contexts.

What is the extent and variation of students' civic knowledge within and across countries?
The question looks at:

- variations in civic knowledge between and within countries, and how and these differences are linked to student background and characteristics; and
- the contextual factors (such as school or classroom environment) that influence students' civic knowledge.

What is the extent of students' engagement in different spheres of society and which factors within or across countries are related to it?
The question looks at:

- students' beliefs about their capacity to engage and the value of civic participation;
- students' civic participation in and out of school; and
- students' expectations regarding civic and political participation in the future.

What beliefs do students in participating countries hold regarding important civic issues in modern society and what are the factors influencing their variation?
The question relates to:

- students' views on the different principles that underpin a democratic society;
- students' attitudes toward civic institutions and society; and
- students' perceptions of social cohesion and diversity in their communities.

How is schooling in participating countries organized with regard to civic and citizenship education and what is its association with students' learning outcomes?
The question considers:

- participatory processes that schools use to encourage civic engagement; and
- school-community interactions that support students' civic learning, and programs or activities (e.g., global awareness, environmental sustainability, peaceful coexistence, responsible social media use) that foster civic knowledge and engagement at local, national and global levels.

Source: Schulz et al., 2025.

The research questions guided both the development of the data collection instruments and the selection of the content for the cognitive test and the contextual questionnaires.

ICCS has collected data from countries in Europe, Latin America, and Asia. The repeated survey cycles make it possible to track changes over time in the participating countries. In the 2022 cycle, new focus areas were added in response to emerging developments in civic and citizenship education, such as increased migration, environmental sustainability, the use of digital technologies for civic engagement, diversity and social relations in school, and globalization.

3.3 ICCS Data Collection Instruments

ICCS uses the following instruments to gather data on students, schools, and teachers:

- The international student test measures students' civic knowledge and ability to analyze and reason on topics related to civic and citizenship education.
- The international student questionnaire collects data on student background variables, school contexts, and student perceptions and beliefs.
- The teacher questionnaire gathers information on teachers' background characteristics and their perceptions of factors related to the context of civic and

citizenship education. It is administered to selected teachers of all subjects teaching the target grade at each sampled school. An additional optional section is included for teachers teaching "civic-related subjects," as defined by national centers.
- The school questionnaire collects information about school characteristics and school-level variables related to civic and citizenship education and on students' participation in school life. This questionnaire is filled out by school principals (or designates).
- The national contexts survey is a questionnaire aimed at gathering data about the structure of the education systems and the status of civic and citizenship education in the national curricula. It is completed by experts within national centers.
- The regional student questionnaires are administered to address issues of special interest for the countries of the different regions participating in the study (Europe, Latin America, and Asia).

All instruments are administered either on paper or through the computer-based delivery platform. In ICCS 2022, the national contexts survey questionnaire was completed exclusively online.

The cognitive test, delivered via the computer-based platform, also included three computer-enhanced test modules. These modules had several distinct characteristics that differentiated them from the items common to both computer-based and paper-based modes. ICCS 2027 completes the study's transition to a fully digital assessment.

3.4 ICCS Key Findings: Students' Knowledge, Attitudes and Engagement, and School and Classroom Contexts

As outlined in Chapter 1, the key findings of ICCS can be grouped into three main areas:

- students' knowledge and understanding of civic topics and issues;
- students' attitudes and values; and
- students' civic engagement.

The first area includes knowledge and understanding of civic institutions, civic principles, and civic roles and identities. In ICCS 2022, students' results in this area were organized in a civic knowledge scale, which identified different proficiency levels based on students' scoring in the cognitive test (see Textbox 3.2 for the proficiency levels identified in ICCS 2022). Those proficiency levels were used to examine the association between students' knowledge and their background variables (such as socioeconomic status,[1] gender, and immigrant background), as well as their attitudes and engagement. They were also used to explore the relations between students' knowledge and school and classroom variables (Schulz et al., 2010, 2018, 2025).

[1] Three indicators of socioeconomic status were used for the construction of a composite index of socioeconomic status: parental occupation, parental education, and number of books in the home (Schulz et al., 2025).

Textbox 3.2 The ICCS 2022 civic knowledge scale

Level D: 311 to 394 score points

Students at Level D of the proficiency scale demonstrate familiarity with concrete, explicit content and examples relating to the basic features of democracy. They identify the intended outcomes of simple examples of rules and laws and recognize the explicit function of key civic institutions. They also recognize examples of respect for the rights of others, and they may see these rights as motivation for citizenship engagement.

Level C: 395 to 478 score points

Students at Level C of the proficiency scale comprehend the fundamental principles and broad concepts that underpin civics and citizenship. Students operating at this level are familiar with some of the "big ideas" of civics and citizenship; they are generally able to accurately determine what is fair or unfair in familiar contexts and to demonstrate some knowledge of the basic operations of civic and civil institutions. They also demonstrate awareness of citizens' capacity to exert influence in their own local context.

Level B: 479 to 562 score points

Students at Level B of the proficiency scale demonstrate some specific knowledge and understanding of the most important civic and citizenship institutions, systems, and concepts. These students generally understand the interconnectedness between civic and civil institutions and the processes and systems through which they operate. These students are also able to demonstrate understanding of the connection between principles or key ideas and how these operate in policy or practice in everyday, familiar contexts. They can relate some formal civic processes to their everyday experience and are aware that the potential sphere of influence (and responsibility) of active citizens extends beyond their own local context.

Level A: 563 score points and above

Students at Level B of the proficiency scale demonstrate a more integrated knowledge and understanding of civic and citizenship concepts. They make evaluative judgments about the merits of policies and behaviors from given perspectives and are able to justify positions or propositions and hypothesize outcomes based on their understanding of civic and citizenship systems and practices. They show understanding of how active citizenship practice can be deliberate and strategic and are able to evaluate active citizenship behaviors in light of their desired outcomes.

Source: Schulz et al., 2025.

The second area emphasizes attitudes and values, including openness to cultural differences, respect, civic-mindedness, responsibility, trust in civic institutions, and the valuing of cultural diversity, democracy, justice, fairness, equality, and the rule of law.

The third area includes students' engagement with social media, their involvement in the local community, and their participation in civic activities both inside and outside school.

Across different ICCS cycles, some key findings related to these three areas have remained consistent (Schulz et al., 2010, 2018, 2025):

Students' knowledge

- Civic knowledge is associated with student gender, with female students demonstrating higher civic knowledge than male students.
- Civic knowledge is positively associated with student socioeconomic status, with students in the high socioeconomic groups scoring significantly higher than those in the lower socioeconomic groups.
- Civic knowledge is associated with student immigrant and language background, with students from an immigrant background scoring lower than other students in most of the participating countries.
- Civic knowledge is associated with an open classroom climate.

Students' attitudes and values

- The majority of students in participating countries viewed democracy as the best form of government. At the same time, most of them agreed with statements expressing critical views of their political system.
- Most participating students strongly endorsed gender equality. A higher level of endorsement was found in female students, in students with higher levels of civic knowledge, and in those with higher socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Most of the students expressed high levels of support for equal rights for immigrants and for all ethnic groups in society. This support was higher among female students and among students with higher levels of civic knowledge.
- Students expressed a high level of support for environmental protection, with female students and students from a higher level of socioeconomic background showing stronger support.

Students' engagement

- High percentages of surveyed students reported to be quite or very interested in political and social issues.
- Relatively high percentages of students reported they have participated in school civic-related activities such as voting for class representatives or the school parliament/council, becoming a candidate for these positions, and taking part in decision-making about how the school is run.
- Across countries, majorities of students reported they are willing to participate in

activities to protect the environment. This willingness is positively associated with civic knowledge.
- Students' expectations of active political participation are positively correlated with civic interest. However, these expectations are lower among female students than male students, and they tend to show a negative association with civic knowledge.
- The majority of students reported expecting to participate in elections. However, relatively few students anticipated participating in more active forms of political engagement, such as joining a political party or a union or running as a candidate in a local election. Students' expectations on electoral participation are linked to factors like socioeconomic background, civic interest, and civic knowledge, as well as the presence of an open classroom climate.

ICCS also explores how various aspects of civic and citizenship education are organized and implemented at both the school and classroom levels. The study has a strong focus on student participatory processes and social interactions at school, and also the ways in which civic and citizenship education is delivered.

One of the most significant findings relates to the openness of classroom climate. The majority of students rated the openness of their classroom climate for discussing civic issues positively. Notably, students' perceptions of an open classroom climate were positively associated with civic knowledge, even after accounting for socioeconomic variables.

This positive association has been one of the most stable findings across all the IEA studies on civic and citizenship education (Torney-Purta et al. 2001). Several other studies have also confirmed this association based on data from other surveys (Knowles et al., 2018; Lin, 2014) and smaller-scale studies (Barber et al., 2021).

Results from ICCS show that, in most countries, students' participation in democratic processes at school was high. The findings also show that the level of students' participation varies across countries. This is often dependent on the extent to which education systems provide students with opportunities for democratic engagement and participation in decision-making processes.

3.5 ICCS and the Building of Democratic Learning Environments

In the previous chapters we highlighted that:

- Students' civic learning (including knowledge, attitudes, and engagement) is shaped by their direct experience in school life, as well as by their interactions within the wider community.
- Creating a school environment where students can directly experience the principles of democracy is linked to three interrelated areas: teaching and learning, school governance and culture, and cooperation with the local community.

This chapter examines how these three areas were addressed in ICCS 2022, particularly through the student, school, and teacher questionnaires. Similar questions on these

topics were included in the questionnaires of all previous surveys. By selecting questions from these three questionnaires, we aim to highlight key aspects of each area and provide teachers with suggestions for self-reflection on how they can contribute to making their classrooms and schools more democratic learning environments.

Our focus is on six questions in the ICCS questionnaires related to the following topics:

1. Openness in classroom discussions (student questionnaire)
2. Students' involvement in classroom activities (teacher questionnaire)
3. Activities related to diversity in the classroom (teacher questionnaire)
4. Teaching and learning activities in the classroom (teacher questionnaire)
5. Civic-related activities carried out in the local community (teacher and school questionnaires)
6. Collaboration between school and local community (school questionnaire)

The first four topics refer to teaching and learning activities in the classroom, while the last two relate to collaboration with the local community.

3.5.1 Openness in Classroom Discussions

Since 1971, IEA studies on civic and citizenship education have examined the relationship between classroom climate and students' learning (Torney et al., 1975). Findings from all study cycles consistently showed a positive association between an open classroom climate, students' civic knowledge, and their expectations of voting as adults (Schulz, 2004; Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

In ICCS 2022, an item (a question) in the student questionnaire was designed to explore students' perceptions of the openness of classroom discussions. It asked students about specific events that may occur when discussing political or social issues during regular lessons (Textbox 3.3). (See Chapter 2 for further information on how classroom climate shapes democratic learning and how it differs from school climate.)

Textbox 3.3 ICCS 2022 student questionnaire: openness in classroom discussions

When discussing political or social issues during regular lessons, how often do the following things happen? (response options: "never," "rarely," "sometimes," "often")

a) Teachers encourage students to make up their own minds.
b) Students [bring up] current political events for discussion in class.
c) Students express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from most of the other students.
d) Teachers encourage students to discuss the issues with people having different opinions.

e) Teachers present several sides of the issues when explaining them in class.
f) Teachers encourage students to express their opinions.

Source: Schulz et al., 2025.

Building an Open Climate for Student Discussion

Although the ICCS question highlighted in Textbox 3.3 relates to discussions on political or social issues, this question can also apply to classroom discussions on various other topics, such as events occurring in the classroom or school, issues within the local community, school rules, conflicts among students, and more.

Teachers play a fundamental role in creating the conditions for an open classroom climate that allows all students to participate, freely express their opinions, and explore the different perspectives that may emerge during discussions.

These conditions can be nurtured in several ways:

- Introducing topics of interest to students or accepting topics they propose.
- Establishing rules that allow all students to participate in discussions and ensuring these rules are respected once agreed.
- Preparing students for discussions and explaining their objectives.
- Encouraging students to gather information related to the topics being discussed.
- Ensuring that all students have the time and space to participate in the discussion.
- Encouraging students to understand others' opinions.
- Supporting students to compare different opinions and to accept viewpoints different from their own.
- Valuing the contributions of all students.
- Prompting students to summarize discussions in a way that considers all expressed opinions.

3.5.2 Students' Involvement in Classroom Activities

In ICCS, teachers are asked to report the extent to which they provide students with the opportunity to be actively involved in classroom activities (Textbox 3.4).

Textbox 3.4 ICCS 2022 teacher questionnaire: students' involvement in classroom activities

To what extent do you involve your [target grade] students in the following activities? (response options: "to a large extent," "to a moderate extent," "to a small extent," "not at all")

a) Taking part in decisions related to teaching content.
b) Contributing to classroom activities planning.

c) Participating in establishing assessment criteria.
d) Participating in school self-evaluation processes.
e) Contributing to the choice of the teaching materials (e.g., textbooks, educational software, multimedia resources).
f) Taking part in establishing classroom rules.

Source: Schulz et al., 2025.

The underlying assumption of this question is that students' active participation in decision-making processes at the classroom level can contribute to creating a democratic learning environment and that, in turn, this can help students understand the benefits of democratic values and practices (Council of Europe, 2018; Ehman, 1980; Hahn, 1999; Perliger et al., 2006).

In ICCS 2022, a high percentage of teachers across participating countries reported that they frequently provided their students with the opportunities listed in the question. Offering learners the possibility to plan and negotiate the content of instruction, learning materials, and assessment procedures allows teachers and students to move beyond traditional roles in the classroom, creating a space where it is possible to learn for as well as through democracy (Council of Europe, 2018).

Strengthening Students' Involvement in Classroom Activities

The classroom activities included in the question in Textbox 3.4 can be developed by teachers of every school subject in everyday classroom situations:[2]

- Classroom rules can be discussed with students, involving them in processes of negotiation and mediation.
- Specific roles can be assigned to individual students based on shared criteria established by the class.
- Assessment criteria can be communicated, shared, and discussed with students to make them aware of how they will be evaluated and to ensure the opportunity to verify their fair application.
- Students can be involved in self-evaluation activities that imply the use of the assessment criteria, thus improving both their understanding and their ability to reflect on their learning and performances.
- Students can be requested to search for materials (e.g., on the internet) that can be used for specific topics and issues.

[2] With reference to the establishment of classroom rules and assessment, see also Chapter 2, Sections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2.

3.5.3 Activities Related to Diversity in the Classroom

In ICCS 2022, teachers were asked about the extent to which they adopt specific strategies and activities to address social and cultural diversity in their classrooms[3] (Textbox 3.5).

Textbox 3.5 ICCS 2022 teacher questionnaire: Activities related to diversity in the classroom

During classes, differences among students can be addressed in various ways. To what extent do you undertake the following activities during your lessons with [target grade] students? (response options: "to a large extent," "to a moderate extent," "to a small extent," "not at all")

a) I discuss cultural differences with students.
b) I encourage students to understand different points of view in class discussions.
c) I ask students to explore different cultural perspectives.
d) I encourage students from different backgrounds to work together (e.g., in group works, peer learning activities).
e) I involve students in discussions on gender issues (e.g., gender equity, gender stereotypes and, gender diversity).
f) I ask students to explore different social and economic perspectives.

Source: Schulz et al., 2025.

In recent years, internal differences within school populations have increased significantly. As a result, schools have adopted strategies and practices to address this increasing diversity and to foster positive attitudes toward diversity among students from different backgrounds (Treviño et al., 2018).

Previous research has shown that school principals and teachers play a key role in creating inclusive schools that serve all students, regardless of their ethnic or cultural background (Billot et al., 2007; Leeman, 2003; Taylor & Kaur Sidhu, 2012).

According to ICCS 2022 results, many lower-secondary teachers across countries adopted the strategies listed in the above question. Furthermore, most of them also reported considering students' cultural, ethnic, social, and economic differences as valuable for teaching. According to their responses, these differences enhance students' sense of empathy and civic mindedness (Schulz et al., 2025).

[3] This question was not included in the questionnaires administered in the ICCS cycles before 2022.

Giving Value to Diversity in the Classroom

The ICCS 2022 results highlight the potential for developing classroom activities that foster positive attitudes towards diversity. They also show that such activities can be incorporated by teachers of different school subjects into their regular lessons (Textbox 3.6). They can be inspired by real-life situations that arise in the classroom, such as:

- welcoming a new student from a different ethnic background;
- a cultural event organized by a minority group in the local community;
- a student reporting what s/he heard in a TV program about a social issue;
- a conflict or disagreement arising between students of different backgrounds; or
- a student sharing in class an incident of gender-based violence that occurred in the local community.

Furthermore, teachers can also encourage their students to reflect on what happens during lessons (Textbox 3.6)

Textbox 3.6 Classroom questions for student self-evaluation on diversity

During lessons…

- Do you have the opportunity to work with other students (e.g., in groups)?
- Do you learn about the different cultures represented in your classroom, school, and local community?
- Do you have the opportunity to discuss and challenge stereotypes, for example, about gender and ethnicity?

Source: Bîrzea et al., 2005.

3.5.4 Teaching and Learning Activities in the Classroom

The ICCS 20022 teacher questionnaire asked teachers how often certain activities take place in their classroom during civic and citizenship-related lessons (Textbox 3.7).

Textbox 3.7 ICCS 2022 teacher questionnaire: Teaching and learning activities in the classroom

How often do the following activities take place during your [target grade] lessons related to [civic and citizenship education]? (response options: “never,” “sometimes,” “often,” “very often”)

a) Students work on projects that involve gathering information outside school (e.g., interviews in the neighborhood, small-scale surveys).

b) Students work in small groups on different topics/issues.

c) Students participate in role plays.
d) Students take notes during the teacher's lectures.
e) Students discuss current issues.
f) Students research and/or analyze information gathered from multiple web sources (e.g., wikis, online newspapers).
g) Students study textbooks.
h) Students propose topics/issues for the following lessons.
i) Students make presentations using digital technologies (e.g., PowerPoint/Prezi, videos, multimedia).
j) Students use digital technologies for project or class work.

Source: Schulz et al., 2025.

The question was designed to capture the teaching and learning activities that teachers actually implement during their civic and citizenship lessons. Some of the activities reflect more traditional teaching methods, while others are more interactive and innovative, requiring active student participation and drawing on students' own experience. Several studies on civic and citizenship education suggested that it should incorporate innovative teaching methods and foster engaging and interactive learning environments to develop students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes in this field (Council of Europe, 2018; European Commission/European Education and Culture Executive Agency [EACEA]/Eurydice, 2017).

The underlying assumption is that more interactive teaching methods:

- enhance students' engagement;
- provide more opportunities to develop their participation skills; and
- foster a more open and dynamic learning environment.

Although the question is designed with a focus on civic and citizenship education, most of the activities included can also take place during lessons of other school subjects.

(See Chapters 4 and 5 for more student-centered and active teaching strategies.)

3.5.5 Civic Engagement in the Community and School-Community Collaboration

In Chapter 2, we highlighted the importance of school-community relationships in CCE and explored different forms of collaboration between schools and external institutions and organizations. In this chapter, we draw on two questions from the ICCS 2022 teacher and school questionnaires to illustrate the types of cooperation implemented in participating countries (Textbox 3.8).

The teacher questionnaire focused on activities that can be carried out in the local

community in cooperation with external groups or organizations[4]. The school questionnaire asked principals about activities the school itself may undertake in collaboration with the local community.

Textbox 3.8 ICCS 2022 Teacher and School questionnaires: Collaboration between school and the local community

Teacher questionnaire

Below is a list of activities that may be carried out by the school in cooperation with external groups/organizations.

During the current school year, have you and your [target grade] students taken part in any of these activities? (response options: "yes" and "no")

a) Activities related to environmental sustainability (e.g., energy, water saving, recycling).
b) Activities related to human rights.
c) Activities for underprivileged people or groups.
d) Cultural activities (e.g., theatre, music).
e) Multicultural and intercultural activities within the [local community] (e.g., promotion and celebration of cultural diversity, food street market).
f) Activities to raise people's awareness of social issues, such as [poverty, gender equality, domestic violence against women, sexual violence against women, and violence against children].
g) Activities aimed at protecting the cultural and historical heritage in the [local community].
h) Visits to political institutions (e.g., Parliament House, Prime Minister's/ President's official residence).
i) Sports events.
j) Activities to raise people's awareness of global issues (e.g., climate change, world poverty, international conflicts, child labor).

School questionnaire

Schools can establish different forms of collaboration with the [local community]. During the current school year, does your school undertake any of the following activities? (response options: "yes" and "no")

a) The school cooperates with local authorities in social or educational projects.

[4] A similar question was also included in the school questionnaire and was also used in the previous ICCS cycles, with minor differences.

b) The school has programs and initiatives related to civic and citizenship education that involve external partnerships (e.g., with universities, youth organizations, nongovernmental organizations, cultural and volunteering organizations).

c) The school develops initiatives for encouraging students' participation in formal governance structures representing young people in the [local community] (e.g., youth councils).

d) The school cooperates with different cultural groups in the [local community] in order to involve students in an intercultural dialogue.

Source: Schulz et al., 2025.

Several studies show the importance of considering both students' within-school and out-of-school experiences and their membership in various communities (Torney-Purta et al., 2010). Other studies show that schools' interactions with their local communities can influence students' perceptions of their relationships (Torney-Purta & Barber, 2004).

Cooperation with the local community is a key aspect of the whole-school approach described in Chapter 2. This cooperation allows schools to address community issues while enhancing students' civic knowledge and fostering the development of skills and attitudes through real-life experiences (Council of Europe, 2018; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023).

In ICCS 2022, most of the teachers across participating countries reported engaging their students in local community activities related to environmental sustainability, cultural initiatives, and the protection of cultural heritage. For both questions included in the teacher and the school questionnaire, results showed a wide variation between countries. These differences likely reflect schools' willingness to establish such collaborations, as well as variations in local contexts, including the availability of institutions and organizations interested in cooperating with schools.

Enhancing Civic-Related Activities in the Local Community

Schools can organize their collaboration with the local community in various ways, involving students in different activities, namely:

- civic-related activities and campaigns;
- partnering with local organizations and institutions; and
- organizing students' visits to political, religious, and cultural institutions.

Teachers can support and extend the cooperation with the local community by:

- establishing partnerships with external organizations (when available), such as nongovernmental organizations, youth organizations, and cultural associations;

- establishing partnerships with other schools and teachers in the local community for the development of common initiatives;
- inviting experts from the local community to participate in debates with their students; and
- inviting parents to share their knowledge and experience in various civic and citizenship education-related fields (e.g., health, law).

3.6 Concluding Remarks

ICCS findings show that higher levels of civic knowledge are positively associated with several important attitudes and forms of civic engagement. These include support for gender equality, equal rights for immigrants and all ethnic groups, endorsement of environmental protection, and the expectation to vote in the future.

These results highlight the importance of linking together the three main dimensions of civic and citizenship education: knowledge, attitudes, and engagement. They also underline how the characteristics of the school environment and the relationships between schools and their local communities can positively influence students' civic learning.

The ICCS findings illustrated in this chapter provide valuable examples of how teachers can work to strengthen both the school environment and school-community partnerships. Furthermore, the student, school, and teacher questionnaire items included can serve as practical resources for educators, helping not only in the design of activities like those described, but also in reflecting on how to foster democratic learning environments through everyday teaching practices.

In Summary

What we learned from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) about building democratic learning environments:

- Open classroom climate: Openness in classroom discussions is positively linked to students' civic knowledge. Students with higher civic knowledge tend to experience classroom discussions that are more open. Teachers play a central role in creating conditions where all students can participate, freely express their opinions, and explore multiple perspectives.
- Student participation: Active involvement in classroom decision-making contributes to democratic learning environments. This, in turn, helps students understand the value of democratic values and practices.
- Equity and inclusion: Civic knowledge is associated with gender, socioeconomic status, and immigrant or language background. School principals and teachers are key to ensuring inclusivity, adopting strategies that address cultural, ethnic and social diversity in classrooms, and fostering positive attitudes toward difference.

- Teaching methods: Innovative and interactive approaches enhance students' engagement, strengthen participation skills, and create a more open and dynamic learning environment.
- School-community links: Teachers help build cooperation between schools and local communities. When students engage in civic activities outside school, these partnerships are further strengthened.

Reading Tips

Education for citizenship in times of global challenge. IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2022 international report.
Authors and year: Wolfram Schulz, John Ainley, Julian Fraillon, Bruno Losito, Gabriella Agrusti, Valeria Damiani, and Tim Friedman (2025).
Link: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-65603-3

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Link: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-20113-4

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Authors and year: Valeria Damiani, Bruno Losito, Gabriella Agrusti, and Wolfram Schulz (2025).
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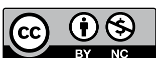

Chapter 4

Classroom Practices for Building Democratic Learning Environments

Gabriella Agrusti

Abstract

This chapter offers a general framework for teaching strategies to implement civic and citizenship education. The first part focuses on fostering an open classroom climate for learning, with particular attention to effective classroom management, creating a sense of community and collaboration in multicultural contexts, and the role of formative assessment in developing democratic learning environments. The second part examines strategies designed to advance students' active participation in their learning, offering examples of approaches that support civic learning, including problem- and project-based learning, case-based learning, discussions and debates, role-playing, and lateral reading for civic online reasoning.

Keywords

classroom management, cultural responsiveness, formative assessment, open classroom climate, teaching strategies

4.1 Introduction

Creating a classroom where students feel free to share different—even opposing—perspectives is one of the most rewarding and challenging aspects of teaching. Political or social disagreements can sometimes discourage students from speaking up, leading to what researchers call a "spiral of silence," where contrasting or unpopular opinions remain unspoken (Knowles, 2020). For educators, the challenge is to turn these moments into opportunities for dialogue, ensuring that every student feels their voice can be heard and respected.

The question of whether schools should be spaces for political or controversial civic-related discussions has recently been raised by governments and in schools located in more conservative contexts (Kahne et al., 2021). Traditionally, teachers are discouraged from sharing their own political views in the classroom, as they are expected to maintain a reasonable standard of impartiality and support students in forming their opinions (Maxwell, 2023). When teachers discuss controversial topics in the classroom, reservations of "hidden politics" can arise, leading to debate over whether (and to what extent) they should disclose their political views to students (e.g., views on vaccination).

Establishing an open classroom climate is particularly relevant when discussing conflictual topics. Some authors suggest that such discussions may lead to an "implicit

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disclosure" of teachers' political opinions, even without explicit disclosure (Dym, 2024). Despite these challenges, research consistently demonstrates that open and participatory classroom climates are fundamental to the development of civic knowledge and engagement (Knowles et al., 2018).

A participatory and collaborative classroom climate helps support active learning strategies, which are often seen as the most effective way to deliver civic and citizenship education (CCE) and are equally valuable across other subjects. These strategies are a key resource for both educational and civic purposes, helping students connect academic learning with the practical experiences of citizenship (Van Dyke, 2014). However, implementing active learning in the classroom can be time consuming and may require additional resources, and it can present challenges in managing student interactions during group work.

The first part of this chapter is dedicated to strategies for fostering an open classroom climate in CCE. Particular attention is given to classroom management, building safe communities of learners, and the role of formative assessment in developing democratic learning environments. This section should be considered in conjunction with Chapter 2. The second part of this chapter explores teaching strategies for CCE and possible actions to improve students' active participation in their own learning, providing examples of selected strategies that can facilitate active civic learning (i.e., problem- and project-based learning, case-based learning, discussion and debate, role-playing, and lateral reading for civic online reasoning). The strategies highlighted in this section can be applied to the examples and best practices presented in Chapter 5.

4.2 Classroom Climate

As highlighted in Chapter 2, school climate is an important aspect of overall school quality. It includes shared beliefs, values, and attitudes by teachers, students, and administrators, as well as the ways they interact with one another. School climate encompasses not only respect for discipline but also the quality of interpersonal relationships, which help create a sense of belonging and the idea of being in a safe environment (Forsberg et al., 2021).

In the following sections (4.3 to 4.5), we look at three key features of classroom climate:

1. Effective classroom management.
2. Building a sense of community and collaboration among students in multicultural contexts.
3. Using formative assessment and positive error handling.

4.3 Classroom Management

Classroom management can take many forms, each guided by different goals and strategies for shaping student behavior and learning:

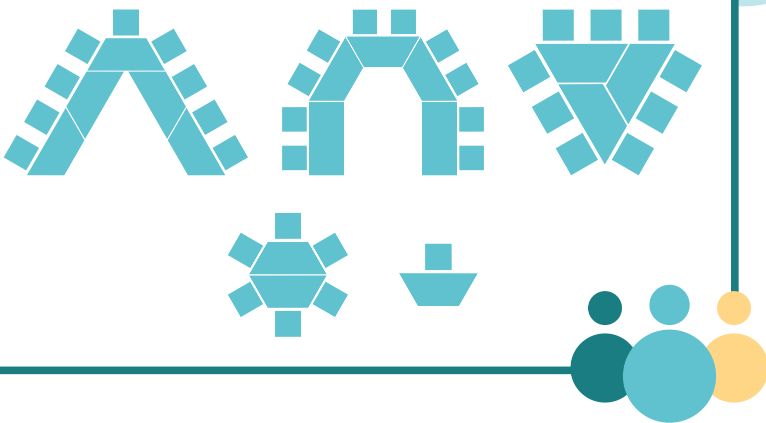
- Constructivist approaches emphasize students' autonomy and responsibility, encouraging learners to reflect on the consequences of their decisions and actions.
- Democratic approaches rely on respectful discussion to promote cooperation and agreement, ensuring the classroom norms are built through dialogue.
- Behaviorist approaches focus on reinforcement, using rewards as the primary technique for shaping students' conduct.
- Authoritarian approaches operate through strong external control, where the teacher enforces strict obedience to rules from a position of unilateral authority.

A balanced mix of these four approaches can also be implemented, taking into account the specific goal of the instructional activity. Moreover, discussion and shared decisions can play a pivotal role in effective classroom management (Textbox 4.1).

Textbox 4.1 How to implement a democratic classroom management approach

Simple classroom decisions can have a big impact on creating a positive climate. Teachers can:

- Involve students in room setup by letting them decide how to arrange the classroom depending on the activity. For example, sitting in a circle for a plenary discussion can encourage openness and respect.
- Use classroom walls for meaningful displays, such as useful references, student work, or thought-provoking quotes, to support reflection and self-expression.
- Frame classroom decisions democratically by posing reflective questions instead of giving direct instructions. For instance: "What do you think a good classroom should look like, and why?"



4.4 Creating Classroom Communities

In Chapter 2 we explored how a whole-school approach to CCE takes a holistic view of school life, especially with teacher-student relationships. An effective approach for teachers when building a classroom community is to pay attention to three key aspects: students' well-being at school (Textbox 4.2), building collaboration in the classroom, and dealing with diversity.

Textbox 4.2 How to foster well-being at school

Promote self-awareness. Following Socrates' principle of "know yourself," teachers can help students recognize, express, and manage their emotions. Activities such as free writing with a focus on vocabulary to describe feelings can build emotional literacy and self-awareness.

Cultivate responsibility in decision-making. Students' sense of responsibility can be strengthened by involving them in decision-making processes. Teachers can guide students to weigh pros and cons, consider consequences, and respect the viewpoints of others. Using a decision-making procedural framework can be useful when facing challenges.

Build a culture of mutual support. Encouraging students to help one another fosters empathy and positive relationships. Teachers can create opportunities for students to offer assistance during exercises and activities, promoting a classroom climate where collaboration and care for peers are valued.

Creating a classroom climate that supports a feeling of community and collaboration is another important aspect of the whole-school approach (Textbox 4.3). This can be achieved by organizing group work and promoting connections among students, which in turn enhances both engagement and academic achievement. Within the broader framework of critical pedagogy, teachers can use a variety of strategies to create environments where students recognize themselves as central to their educational experience (Meinking & Hall, 2020). Such environments allow students to practice self-directed and collective learning, in contrast to teacher-dependent or competitive approaches (Coleman et al., 2023).

Textbox 4.3 How to build collaboration in the classroom

Promote interdependence. Students should be encouraged to adopt collaborative attitudes, behaviors, and ways of thinking. Seating arrangements, sharing materials, and regular social interaction can support

this, but intentional structuring by the teacher is essential. Teachers can consider deliberatively composing groups to mix students of different skills and learning needs, making groups that are neither too big nor too small (generally four to five students per group).

Design real-world assignments. Assignments should reflect real-word problems that require multiple contributions and points of view. Within each group clear roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined to ensure students' participation. Teachers can consider techniques such as the "jigsaw" method, which allows students to build their own expertise on a specific topic or skill before passing it on to their classmates.

Ensure psychological safety. Effective collaboration depends on mutual respect, constructive feedback, and active listening. Teachers can foster this sense of safety by embedding routines that regulate respectful dialogue, such as "think-pair-share," which can be used to scaffold collaboration, gradually moving from individual reflection to group discussion.

The metacognitive and social skills that are involved in building cooperation among students are useful for not only navigating their academic lives but also their lives beyond the classroom. For this reason, collaboration should be the focus of targeted teaching strategies designed to boost students' communication skills, such as asking relevant questions, listening respectfully, summarizing key concepts, or clarifying their point of view. One effective strategy is to merge teaching and assessment practices. When assessment is meaningful for students' growth, it reflects all aspects of the teaching and learning process, including both individual and group work. Assessment can be supported by tools such as "rubrics" that define what good collaboration looks like in practice (Textbox 4.4).

Textbox 4.4 Using rubrics for assessment

A rubric is a scoring guide that describes the specific components of a completed assignment, using indicators and examples. Rubrics are widely used not only for group projects but also for research papers, presentations, and creative tasks.

Although rubrics can be time-consuming in their preparation, they are effective for:

- Communicating detailed expectations about the assignment to

students before they begin the task.

- Providing structured on-task feedback to support improvement.

For rubrics to work as a reliable assessment tool, they must be descriptive and specific. Vague terms like "good" and "outstanding" should be avoided. Instead, teachers can describe what makes a task "outstanding." For example, in an essay, rather than writing "presentation of the main information is very good," it could be phrased as "information is presented logically and in an engaging way for the reader."

Source: Brookhart & Nitko, 2008.

A strong sense of collaboration among students is essential for creating an open classroom climate, which, in turn, supports civic learning. This involves encouraging open discussions and critical thinking about citizenship-related issues. Such topics can be controversial and difficult to address, particularly in multicultural school settings. To support this context, culturally responsive teaching—an approach in which teachers use students' culture as a "vehicle for learning" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 161)—can be implemented to integrate students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum (Azizan et al., 2025). Through culturally responsive teaching, teachers can draw on students' cultural experiences and perspectives to value diversity and foster a sense of belonging and willingness to participate, making the teaching and learning processes more relevant and effective (Ashrafova, 2024). Positive effects are evident in students' civic knowledge, their attitudes toward participation in classroom and school activities, and ultimately, their civic engagement (Textbox 4.5).

Textbox 4.5 Key points for culturally responsive teaching for CCE

a) **Begin with self-reflection.** Teachers can reflect on their own cultural assumptions and possible biases, as this is the first step to creating equitable learning environments.

b) **Audit classroom diversity.** Teachers can collect information about students' cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Activities such as storytelling (both oral and written) about family histories or students' real-life experiences can provide valuable insights.

c) **Design inclusive lessons.** Lesson plans should draw on each student's cultural knowledge, making them feel like "experts" when topics connected to their background arise.

d) **Ensure a safe space.** Classrooms should allow students to express their identities and points of view without fear of judgment or discrimination. Ensuring a safe space can be supported by team-building activities and

games before addressing sensitive topics and by validating different points of view during discussions and together finding solutions or alternative conclusions.

e) **Engage families, guardians, or caregivers.** Teachers can consider connecting with students' families and guardians to help extend learning beyond the classroom, which can bring additional resources into the educational process.

Source: Ashrafova, 2024.

The above mentioned suggestions represent only some of the many activities that are possible to implement when teaching in a multicultural context. Structural conditions or antecedents must also be carefully considered and addressed, such as linguistic diversity, which requires visual aids or compensative strategies to support comprehension. Conflicts that may arise in the classroom should also be managed appropriately by teaching conflict resolution skills and the consideration of different cultural perspectives on a given issue.

4.5 Formative Assessment and Positive Error Handling

Perhaps the most important aspect that can make a difference in shaping classroom climate, including teacher-learner relationships, is assessment. In Chapter 2 of this volume, we highlighted formative assessment as a key factor that enables teachers to deliver democratic processes in the classroom by allowing students to monitor their learning.

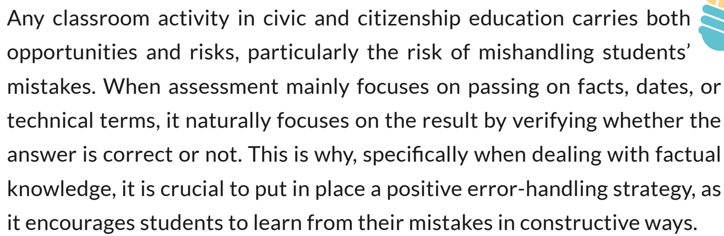
There are at least two levels for teachers to consider in assessment:

1. Formal summative assessment organization and management.
2. Informal daily formative assessment strategies.

Both are crucial to allow open discourse during the teaching-learning process and ensure supportive learning environments. hey can be used in different moments, from the beginning to the end of the course.

Despite the use of different methods in summative assessment, it is through the use of formative assessment that relationships between teachers and students can shift, creating a classroom climate where students actively participate in their own learning. Careful attention to feedback is crucial. When emphasis is placed only on the outcome of learning (e.g., if the answer is wrong or right), the climate may become competitive rather than collaborative. A more constructive approach is to focus on the process (e.g., asking questions about how and why an answer is right or wrong) and encouraging reflection (Butler, 1987). In this way, formative assessment emphasizes growth and understanding, rather than judgment, and helps foster a cooperative learning environment where responsibility for learning is shared (Textbox 4.6).

Textbox 4.6 Positive error handling



Any classroom activity in civic and citizenship education carries both opportunities and risks, particularly the risk of mishandling students' mistakes. When assessment mainly focuses on passing on facts, dates, or technical terms, it naturally focuses on the result by verifying whether the answer is correct or not. This is why, specifically when dealing with factual knowledge, it is crucial to put in place a positive error-handling strategy, as it encourages students to learn from their mistakes in constructive ways.

A supportive approach provides students with feedback that:

✓ Details how they carried out the task, encouraging alternative ways of thinking to solve the task.

✓ Is timely provided, right after the completion of the task for simpler tasks, or even during the task in case it is a long and articulated one.

✓ Includes praise, not only "you got this fast," but also encouragements linked to expected behaviors connected to the task (i.e., "you followed a clear strategy to reach your solution of the problem").

A supportive approach avoids:

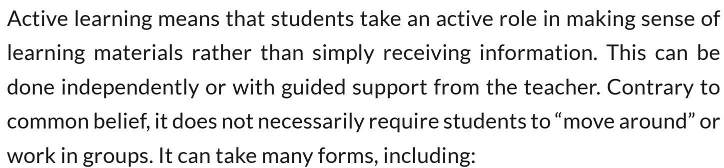
- Grades or marks that can distract students from improvement and reduce motivation (i.e., "you got this mark/score because your paper is confused and not well written").
- Personal judgments about the learner (i.e., "you are lazy") as it draws the attention from the task to a fixed characteristic of the student.

By concentrating on the process rather than the overall result, teachers can help students feel safe to take risks, reflect on their learning, and grow from their mistakes. Turning errors into stepping-stones for deeper civic learning.

4.6 Teaching Strategies for Civic and Citizenship Education

Providing an open and positive classroom climate, together with the use of formative assessment, can serve as a strong lever for active learning. Research in the field also shows active learning strategies are particularly effective in CCE (Balogun & Yusuf, 2019) (Textbox 4.7).

Textbox 4.7 What active learning looks like



Active learning means that students take an active role in making sense of learning materials rather than simply receiving information. This can be done independently or with guided support from the teacher. Contrary to common belief, it does not necessarily require students to "move around" or work in groups. It can take many forms, including:

- Metacognitive strategies: helping students learn how to reflect on and regulate their learning.
- Scaffolding: providing structured support so that students can achieve learning goals on their own.

Source: Balogun & Yusuf, 2019.

The following sections introduce some of the most prominent and versatile teaching strategies for CCE. These strategies are presented with examples that can support the development of civic knowledge, attitudes, and engagement. Specifically, three groups of teaching strategies are presented:

1. Problem-based approaches (e.g., project-based, inquiry-based, and case-based learning).
2. Debate, discussions, and role plays.
3. Lateral reading apprenticeship for civic online reasoning.

4.6.1 Problem-Based, Inquiry-Based, and Project-Based, and Case-Based Learning

For more than half a century, *problem-based learning* (PBL) has been recognized as one of the most effective learner-centered approaches. It empowers students to take ownership of their learning by guiding them to build their own paths and develop skills such as actively searching for reliable sources of information, applying knowledge to the real world, and finding feasible solutions to problems (Savery, 2006).

PBL is an instructional approach that shifts the responsibility for one's own learning from the teacher to the student. Learners are engaged in activities that are appropriate to their level of achievement and are encouraged to address them in interdisciplinary and collaborative ways. At the same time, they are given the right amount of freedom and structure to explore and tackle the challenges presented.

Within CCE, PBL can be applied to engage students in active learning processes, not only for enhancing their understanding of civic concepts, but also to develop critical thinking skills and to foster participation (Nurmanita & Samsuri, 2018). Self-directed learning is a core component of PBL approaches. It encourages students to develop a sense of responsibility and independence from their teacher. In this way, teachers are

seen as a fruitful aid rather than "the owner" of all the solutions (Textbox 4.8). PBL can be particularly effective when it is directed toward fostering students' civic engagement as it equips them to take initiative, reflect critically, and act responsibly in relation to civic issues (Keegan et al., 2017).

Textbox 4.8 How to apply a PBL approach to CCE

Problem-based learning (PBL) begins with a real-world problem, event, or phenomenon as a starting point for inquiry. Ideally, this problem emerges naturally from classroom discussions or current events that matter to students. Teachers can guide the process by framing a sufficiently broad and challenging open-ended question that challenges students to think critically. The goal is not simply to find the "correct answer" or the "solution" but to gain new knowledge and understanding along the way.

In PBL students take the lead by:

- analyzing the question and breaking it into manageable parts;
- generating a hypothesis to describe and explain the problem;
- finding relevant information and processing it; and
- considering possible follow-up questions.

This process creates a continuous cycle of inquiry, where each step leads to further questions and richer understanding. The teacher's role is to support and scaffold this journey, ensuring students remain engaged, focused, and reflective.

The concept of PBL has gained traction in scientific teaching literature, resulting in many variations and a lack of agreement on the terminology. To provide clarity, this section highlights a few key distinctions while acknowledging that they represent only a partial view of a much broader field.

Related approaches include *inquiry-based*, *project-based*, and *case-based* learning. Inquiry-based learning, in particular, is very similar to PBL and is rooted in John Dewey's seminal idea that learning stems from individual curiosity (Dewey, 1910). This curiosity sparks a process of gathering information, sharing discoveries with peers, and reflecting on the new knowledge created (Kanter & Konstantopoulos, 2010).

Unlike PBL, project-based learning is typically oriented toward producing a final product. Learning activities are organized around a shared goal (i.e., the "project") and the emphasis is more on the outcome than on the process. Tasks are structured in detail, and there is often a desired end artifact or product (Textbox 4.9).

To complete the assignment, students must analyze a set of interconnected problems that arise from the goal and develop possible viable solutions for each. This process leads to the creation of a prototype, which can be tested and improved with feedback from the teacher, experts, and peers (Blumenfeld et al., 1991).

Textbox 4.9 Key points for project-based learning in CCE

a) **Create meaningful, real-world experiences**. Projects should connect to students' everyday lives and communities (e.g., designing redevelopment ideas for an abandoned area, creating a community mural to raise awareness of an issue, or planning ways to increase donations to a local food bank).

b) **Ensure alignment with curriculum content.** Projects should integrate knowledge and skills from multiple subjects, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of project-based learning.

c) **Promote students' agency through collaboration.** Collaboration should extend beyond completing a task together; students should be encouraged to build on one another's knowledge and insights to create something new collectively.

d) **Track student progress**. Teachers can use observational checklists and/or rubrics to monitor learning. The information collected should guide feedback and improvement rather than serve as a basis for grading.

e) **Incorporate ongoing and constructive feedback and guidance**. Timely feedback should be provided on interim products, using modeling and scaffolding to support student progress.

f) **Encourage reflection and revision.** Students should be guided through self-evaluation processes using shared and transparent assessment criteria that help them refine their work and learning strategies.

Finally, case-based learning focuses on presenting the case by listing relevant elements and encouraging students to engage in real-world problem-solving. This strategy enhances their critical thinking skills and helps them understand the practical application of theory. Case-based learning (often used in legal and medical education) puts learning into context, with the possibility of assessing the solutions found empirically (Textbox 4.10).

Case-based learning for CCE can include current contemporary civic issues that relate concepts to students' daily lives and promote engagement; comparative case

studies that present multiple cases of similar civic challenges in different time periods or contexts; personal-narrative cases that use testimonials among activists, leaders, or ordinary citizens to consider an open issue; and digital-based case studies that are designed and developed with multimedia resources and aimed at developing digital literacy and critical media consumption-related skills (Williams, 1992). Case-based learning differs from project-based learning which has the expectation clearly defined in terms of outcome and offers the learner less freedom to pose and select their own questions and parameters to carry out the activity.

Textbox 4.10 How to apply a case-based learning approach to CCE

Case-based learning can be introduced through **critical incident analysis**, such as critical moments in civic history. Students can be asked to consider the context, identify the main actors, analyze decision-making processes, and evaluate their consequences. In this process, they should be encouraged to recognize the different stakeholders involved, consider broader societal implications, and reflect on possible ethical dilemmas.

Structured guiding questions provided by the teacher can help students practice evidence-based reasoning in a safe and respectful environment. A key element of this approach is the integration between the analysis and opportunities for **metacognitive reflection** (i.e., giving students the possibility to reflect on the hidden assumptions, on the chain of reasoning they followed, and on how they acquired new information).

4.6.2 Debate and Discussion in CCE Development

Debate can be a powerful tool for developing students' civic knowledge and engagement. Its benefits encompass developing critical thinking skills, selecting and analyzing information, building reasoned arguments, and expressing a specific position on a subject. Additionally, public speaking abilities, self-efficacy, and managing emotions under pressure represent crucial skills in debates and can be linked to future active participation in a democratic society (Hogan et al., 2014).

Debate and organized discussion in the classroom also promote conflict resolution by offering a structured framework for discussing critical issues. But probably the most important aspect is the need to consider diverse perspectives on the same topic, fostering a deeper understanding of complex societal challenges. The group work associated with debating can also leverage empathy and reinforce teamwork skills.

When organizing a debate in CCE, it is important to be mindful of the potential drawbacks (Textboxes 4.11 and 4.12). Without careful moderation, debates can become overly antagonistic, with some students dominating discussions while others are reluctant to speak. This dynamic can reinforce differences in self-confidence and discourage broad participation. In addition, the competitive focus of "winning" an argument may oversimplify complex and controversial issues, leading to polarized thinking rather than encouraging an appreciation of different viewpoints.

The most important part of the debate is students' preparation. This can take place via brainstorming sessions, followed by searching for information and relevant and reliable sources. Findings are shared in a plenary session, helping prepare the speech in a structured fashion. A cognitive strategy that can be helpful is "consider-the-opposite," where students are forced to support an opinion contrary to their own (Hogan et al., 2014).

When a structured debate is not feasible due to limited time or resources, group discussion can serve as an effective substitute, provided it is carefully managed, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics (Textbox 4.12). Research shows that deep dialogue and critical thinking in group discussions can help engage passive students in citizenship education classes (Dewi et al., 2023).

Textbox 4.11 How to implement a debate on civic and citizenship-related topics

Debate is not simply a series of monologues but a meaningful exchange of ideas. To make it effective, students need to take turns to speak, listen to each other carefully, and respect **common rules**. These ground rules are a way to manage the emotions that can arise from public speaking and ensure the focus remains on building strong arguments supported by evidence.

A teacher (or facilitator) introduces a clear **claim** on a civic-related topic in civic and citizenship education, ideally drawn from current issues (e.g., "open borders are good for countries," "the advantages of joining a supranational organization outweigh the disadvantages," "democracy is a good form of government"). The class then divides into two groups, one in favor of and the other against the claim.

Each group prepares their arguments, which can be organized as a speech or essays to be read aloud.

To structure their arguments, students can use the **PEEL method**:

- Point: state the argument clearly.
- Explanation: describe why this argument is important.
- Example/evidence: support the argument with facts, examples, or data.

- Link: connect back to the main claim.

The debate can include a jury composed of students from different courses, other teachers, families, or local community representatives who evaluate the debate using a rubric or a scoring guide. Criteria may include communicative skills, clarity of reasoning, use of evidence, and the ability to engage respectfully with opposing views. For example, younger students may be assessed on presenting opinions in simple terms, while older students may be asked to develop arguments systematically with relevant supporting evidence.

Textbox 4.12 Supporting effective classroom dialogue in CCE

a) **Provide frequent opportunities for discussion practice**. Students, particularly those less familiar with open dialogue, benefit from regular opportunities to engage in discussion. This approach is more effective than tightly controlling the content.

b) **Encourage personal connections**. When exploring unfamiliar topics, students should be invited to draw on personal experiences as examples to support understanding and engagement.

c) **Emphasize reasoning as well as content**. Classroom discussions should focus on both what students say and how they build their arguments, placing particular importance on the reasoning process.

d) **Deepen reasoning through real-world relevance**. Introducing real-life consequences into discussions can help students think critically and strengthen their reasoning.

e) **Model calm and respectful responses.** When confronted with extreme or provocative statements, teachers should respond calmly and professionally, avoiding rudeness or sarcasm, and instead demonstrating respectful engagement with challenging citizenship-related issues.

Finally, role-playing and simulations are also effective CCE teaching strategies in boosting student engagement, developing key civic skills, and increasing knowledge retention (Halverson et al., 2024). They make otherwise complex and abstract subjects more interactive and enjoyable for students (Textbox 4.13). By stepping into different roles, students can develop critical skills such as identifying and describing problems

and making decisions on civic issues. At this same time, role-playing fosters creativity, collaboration, and social skills, encouraging learners to engage with civic content in active and thoughtful ways (Mutia, 2024).

Teachers may face challenges in effectively implementing role-playing due to a lack of familiarity with the strategy or uncertainty about how to integrate it into the curriculum. Furthermore, if the number of students per class is too large, it can be difficult to manage the class during acting and discussions. Finally, if students struggle to express their thoughts and ideas, the effectiveness of the entire activity can be compromised.

Textbox 4.13 Using role-play in CCE

Role-play can be a powerful strategy to help students reflect on and experience civic-related issues. To be effective, it requires careful preparation and the establishment of clear **ground rules**.

Before the start of the role-play, learners should agree on the following:

- Feedback must always be respectful and constructive.
- Participation must be highly valued for all.
- A general feeling of awkwardness is natural, especially at the beginning, and will diminish with practice.

Before starting, students should be invited to share any concerns about the activity. This provides an opportunity to address discomfort and reinforce the importance of creating a safe and supportive learning environment.

Because role-play relies heavily on communication, **small groups** of four to eight participants work best. Smaller groups reduce the stress of public exposure and ensure each learner can play an active role in the activity.

Role-play can be **script-based**, either prepared entirely in advance by the teacher or partially or fully written by learners. Students should start by researching sources (historical or focused on a current civic-related issue). Once role-play becomes familiar, it is possible to move gradually from prepared scripts to improvised scenarios.

4.6.3 Lateral Reading for Civic Online Reasoning

Lateral reading is a critical information literacy technique particularly valuable for CCE (Textbox 4.14). It involves evaluating the credibility of information read online by moving away from the original source (i.e., the specific website being read) to check other sources about the same topic or claim (Breakstone, Smith, Connors, et al., 2021).

Recent studies showed that even undergraduate students lack fact-checking skills

(Brodsky et al., 2021). This can lead them to accept information uncritically, without assessing its trustworthiness. Data from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) 2023 revealed that only four percent of eighth-grade students across surveyed countries were able to evaluate the reliability of websites (Fraillon, 2025).

Professional fact-checkers, particularly in journalism, are responsible for evaluating the accuracy and credibility of information before it comes out, to avoid the rapid spread of misinformation.

While these practices fall under the broader framework of digital literacy, they have specific features that makes it particularly useful for CCE. In this context, they are referred to as *civic online reasoning*—the ability to critically assess the reliability and trustworthiness of online information (Breakstone , Smith, Wineburg, et al., 2021).

Textbox 4.14 Practicing civic online reasoning

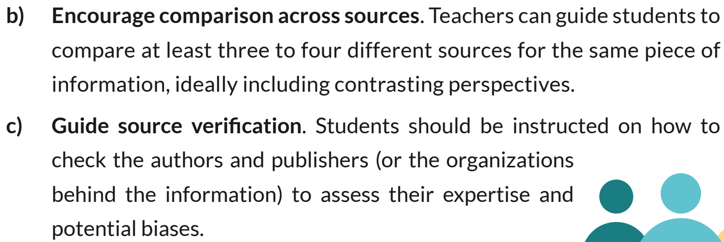
Online lateral reading: This means opening additional tabs while researching online, moving *horizontally* and not only vertically through a single site. Students are encouraged to consult multiple sources to check both the reliability of the information and the trustworthiness of the source itself.

Click restraint: Instead of clicking on the first result in the list of an online search, students are encouraged to pause, scan through several results, and evaluate which sources best fit their purpose. Taking even a short moment to read the snippets provided under each link can make a significant difference in the quality of the research performed.

Evaluating the quality of the information, particularly in the social and political domains, is a necessary component of any active learning strategy in CCE. Given that online searching has become the primary and often the only source of information for many students (Brodsky et al., 2021), it is crucial to verify claims by consulting and contrasting different sources to assess their reliability and accuracy (Textbox 4.15).

Textbox 4.15 Strategies for evaluating online information

a) **Promote pauses**. Students should be encouraged to pause whenever they encounter an online claim or source. Before reading in detail, they should briefly assess its trustworthiness by investigating the reliability of the source itself.



b) **Encourage comparison across sources**. Teachers can guide students to compare at least three to four different sources for the same piece of information, ideally including contrasting perspectives.

c) **Guide source verification**. Students should be instructed on how to check the authors and publishers (or the organizations behind the information) to assess their expertise and potential biases.

It is important to recognize that there may be a gap between students' perceived and actual use of lateral reading. While many believe that they are applying this strategy, research shows a general lack of monitoring and awareness when evaluating online information (Brodsky et al., 2021). Proper use of lateral reading can instead foster essential civic and citizenship competencies. By critically evaluating political information presented in the media, students learn to distinguish between facts and opinions and to compare multiple viewpoints before drawing conclusions.

4.7 Concluding Remarks

Building a democratic learning environment encompasses a selection of evidence-based didactic principles and teaching strategies. This chapter presented several such approaches, focused mainly on building an open classroom climate and engaging students in learning activities that could be meaningful to them. Teachers can play a pivotal role in this process by adopting a learner-centered classroom management philosophy. Such an approach redefines the very idea of "management" by the teacher, shifting the focus from enforcing a teacher's viewpoint to fostering students' potential and agency.

The use of assessment is another key consideration when planning CCE-related activities. Formative assessment, in particular, can support students' learning by providing positive, constructive, task-focused feedback that aligns with activities undertaken and the expected learning outcomes.

Lastly, engaging students in addressing real problems or working toward concrete projects offers a powerful way to capture the intrinsic multidimensional nature of CCE. Through these activities, students develop essential skills related to collecting and understanding reliable information and to building well-reasoned public arguments that prepare them to become more informed, critical, and active participants in democratic processes.

In Summary

Civic and citizenship education (CCE) flourishes in an open classroom climate, fostered by democratic classroom management. Six key didactic principles can guide educators in delivering CCE effectively:

1. **Foster responsibility in decision-making.** Students can be encouraged to weigh the pros and cons, reflect on consequences, and consider broader implications in their daily lives.
2. **Promote mutual support and collaboration.**
   a) Tasks can be designed to require multiple perspectives and diverse skills.
   b) Cooperative techniques such as the jigsaw and think-pair-share can be used to ensure systematic sharing of knowledge and skills.
3. **Implement culturally responsive teaching for CCE.** Diversity in the classroom should be valued, while ensuring that all students feel safe to express their point of view on social issues.
4. **Using formative assessment to support civic and citizenship learning.** Constructive, task-focused feedback can be provided to guide improvement, while judgmental or non-task-related remarks should be avoided.
5. **Adopt active learning strategies.** Students can be engaged through dynamic and participatory approaches, including:
   a) Problem-based learning
   b) Project-based learning
   c) Case-based learning
   d) Debates (including competitive debates)
   e) Role-playing

6) **Develop critical information literacy.** Regular opportunities should be provided to students to evaluate the credibility of information (e.g., by practicing lateral reading techniques).

Reading Tips

Towards an inclusive social and emotional learning.
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Chapter 5

Experiencing Civic and Citizenship Education at School: Good Practice Examples From Four ICCS Countries

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Abstract

This chapter examines five good practice examples conducted in four International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) participating countries—Brazil, Italy, Slovenia, and the Netherlands. Each example outlines the national and school-level contexts of civic and citizenship education (CCE), illustrating approaches for its implementation. Despite differing institutional settings, all examples share a commitment to democratic learning environments through active and experiential learning methodologies that foster democratic engagement and critical reflection. The examples include a project on Brazilian Black Awareness Day, a debate tournament in collaboration with the Trentino Historical Museum Foundation in Trento, Italy, a student-led flash mob against gender violence in Rome, Italy, a social stratification role play in the Netherlands, and an online source-based debate on elections in Slovenia. Collectively, the activities demonstrate the diversity, adaptability, and transformative potential of CCE in linking classroom learning to broader civic action and community engagement.

Keywords

classroom learning, democratic learning environments, project-based CCE learning, school-level CCE contexts;

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents five examples of civic and citizenship education (CCE) activities across four countries that took part in the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS)—Brazil, Italy, Slovenia, and the Netherlands.

Each example includes a short description of the country's national context for teaching CCE, indicating whether it is taught as a separate subject, integrated into other subjects, and/or approached as a cross-curricula theme. It also describes the school context, explaining how CCE is delivered within the specific school where the activity took place. Together, these sections highlight the differences that occur at the country and school levels in relation to CCE national guidelines and approaches (see Chapter 1).

The activities tackle one or more key aspects of CCE in democratic learning environments, with a common feature: the use and implementation of active and experiential learning

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methodologies. These approaches are aimed at engaging students directly, encouraging them to explore and understand contemporary issues in a meaningful way. Examples include:

- **Project-based learning from Brazil**. Inspired by a training program from a local nongovernmental organization (NGO), this project explores Brazilian Black Awareness Day and examines the roots of contemporary Brazilian societies from historic and geographic perspectives. Conducted over a medium to long period, the project takes place at the classroom level but has strong potential to impact the whole school.
- **Debate tournament in collaboration with the Trentino Historical Museum Foundation from Trento, Italy.** Focused on political themes, this activity forms part of a wider debate tournament implemented in the Autonomous Province of Trento, in Northern Italy. The activity highlights how collaboration with local institutions can deepen civic learning and engagement.
- **Project-based flash mob against gender violence from Rome, Italy.** Initiated by the students, this project involved NGOs, local authorities, and the community. Students organized and carried out a flash mob, demonstrating how civic learning in the classroom can extend into impactful real-world action.
- **Debate on voting and elections from Slovenia.** Students prepare for a debate by searching for and critically evaluating information online. Using lateral reading as a civic online reasoning strategy provides opportunities to assess sources and also engage in a structured discussion about democratic participation.
- **Role play on social stratification from the Netherlands**. Students take part in a simulation of the social ladder and then discuss and reflect on social standing and inequality. The activity prompts critical discussions on social stratification and its implications.

For all the activities listed to be meaningful and successful, it is essential that a positive and open classroom climate be built. Alongside the activities, the democratic learning environment can be further strengthened by using formative assessment for students' evaluation or adopting a cooperative learning approach (see Chapter 4).

The wide range of teaching approaches and strategies, together with the many ways in which the classroom connects to the outside world (whether through collaboration with other classes, whole-school initiatives, or involving NGOs and local authorities), illustrates the diversity and richness of CCE activities. These activities highlight the multi-perspective nature of CCE and its capacity to engage learners in meaningful and varied ways.

5.2 Strengthening Civic Education and Cultural Identity. An Example from Brazil

Maribel Alves Fierro Sevilla

5.2.1 Civic and Citizenship Education in Brazil

In Brazil, civic and citizenship education (CCE) is not a separate subject in the school curriculum but rather a theme addressed across subject areas in an integrated way. It

is present in the humanities (history, geography, philosophy, sociology, and religious education), as well as arts and languages. The inclusion of these contents is shaped by national curriculum guidelines, which emphasize the importance of citizenship and democratic participation in building critical, engaged citizens who are aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Since these guidelines are not mandatory, how CCE is delivered depends on the initiative of managers, teachers, and external partnerships, often linked to nongovernmental institutions and specialized agencies. With thousands of schools and over one million teachers in Brazil, the absence of mandatory national guidelines results in differences in curricula across schools and classrooms. As a consequence, the development of students' civic awareness often depends on the individual efforts of educators and on external initiatives, which are rarely coordinated throughout students' educational journeys.

Furthermore, the decentralization of basic education in Brazil creates a scenario where different educational systems coexist. This flexibility fosters the development of diverse pedagogical practices and encourages innovation and experimentation in knowledge production. It is also essential given the large differences existing within the Brazilian school system, which reflect the varied characteristics of its vast territory, as well as the cultural and socioeconomic diversity of its population.

Many nongovernmental organizations work in different regions of Brazil to strengthen CCE. The example presented below was inspired by a training program from the Instituto Auschwitz, which participates in the National Network for Citizenship Education (RedeNEC). This network identifies 115 different organizations dedicated to strengthening democratic culture in Brazil by connecting to and inspiring the citizenship education ecosystem (http://redenec.org).

School: Centro de Ensino Fundamental 306 Norte, Brasília, Brazil

Civic and citizenship education at Centro de Ensino Fundamental 306 Norte (CEF 306 Norte)

CEF 306 Norte is a public urban school located in Brasília, Brazil. The school serves students from primary education cycles up to the seventh grade and operates within a framework of democratic management, inclusive education, and interdisciplinary learning.

Classroom activities at CEF 306 Norte focus on active student participation through interdisciplinary projects, integrating subjects such as history, geography, sociology, language, and arts to promote critical thinking, civic engagement, and respect for diversity. The school management actively encourages community participation by involving parents, students, and teachers in decision-making processes through surveys, meetings, and assemblies.

The classroom environment mirrors this commitment, integrating citizenship education, diversity, and sustainability. These are guided by the local curriculum framework, which identifies education for diversity and citizenship, education for human rights, and education for sustainability as cross-cutting themes to be taught across subject disciplines.

The classroom project described below took place in a seventh-grade classroom.

5.2.2 Project: "One Day, One Month, a Whole Life With Awareness!" Black History and Human Rights

This project took place in a Portuguese language class, inspired by Black Awareness Day, which was established as a national holiday in 2003. The project combined themes of Black history and human rights within an inclusive and participatory setting, fostering dialogue, reflection, and collaboration. Students engaged in meaningful discussions on historical and social issues through the lens of language learning.

When a student asked why an "awareness day" should be commemorated, the teacher explained that equal rights remain a global concern. To illustrate, he showed a banner from Black History Month in the United States of America (USA), emphasizing that the discussion extends beyond a single day to a full month dedicated to examining how racism, prejudice, and intolerance can harm society. Teaching CCE in the context of a Portuguese language class resulted in a project-based learning approach, incorporating diverse media productions into a year-long project. Throughout the school year, the teacher organized a series of activities to broaden opportunities for reflection on human rights, embedding awareness as part of an ongoing, lifelong learning process.

Project objectives:
The project's main objective is to foster knowledge and promote reflection on the history and rights of the Black population, both in Brazil and worldwide, highlighting aspects of culture, identity, and the fight against racism. In addition, it seeks to develop critical awareness and appreciation of diversity in students through the analysis of historical events, concepts of citizenship, and human rights using language skills. This project aims to develop and strengthen language, as this skill is seen as a fundamental life skill that empowers individuals to engage with the world, advocate for change, and build bridges of understanding.

Content:
Under the theme "Black Awareness Day," students examine the trajectory of the Afro-descendant population in Brazil, their contribution to society, and the challenges they have faced in different historical and geographical contexts.

Materials:
The teacher prepares a banner as a visual display that highlights key information about the Afro-descendant population. The purpose of the banner is to showcase prominent Afro-descendant figures in Brazil and present statistical data and visual representations of Afro-descendant populations in Brazil and in the USA.

Roles of teachers and students:
The teacher prepares the banner and selects additional instructional materials, such as United Nations Women videos or hip-hop music videos on human rights, encouraging students to engage in critical analysis and to apply persuasive and argumentative language in their work. Acting as a mediator, the teacher comments on the information presented, guides research, and organizes and facilitates discussions.

Students, meanwhile, are invited to collaborate on a portfolio exploring African Brazilian influences. They actively engage in discussion groups, share their perceptions, and build a deeper, collective understanding of the topics covered. This makes the learning process more interactive, reflective, and meaningful. The final stage of the project involves students presenting the results of their work in a school exhibition.

5.2.3 Project Launch and Student Engagement

The project includes five activities.

Activity 1: Exploring the messages behind the banner (10–15 minutes)

Teachers:
The teacher brings a large, illustrated banner and displays it where all students can clearly see it. This invites active observation, encouraging students to explore visual and textual details, ask questions, and participate more spontaneously. Then, the teacher reads aloud and discusses the description of Black History Month and Black Awareness Day with open-ended questions such as:

- Have you heard of Black Awareness Day? How is it celebrated here?
- Do you identify with any important figure from Black culture?
- What do you know about the history of Afro-descendant people in Brazil?

(If students cannot remember, give some examples to initiate conversation, such as Zumbi dos Palmares and Gunga in Brazil.)

- Can you mention an important Afro-descendant figure in other countries?

(Examples: Martin Luther King in the United States, Nelson Mandela in South Africa, etc.)

The teacher asks students to organize themselves into groups of three or more and to search online for examples or influences from African Brazilian culture; the students must decide who will be the note-taker to prepare ideas for presentation. The teacher supports the class with creating categories such as music, food, fashion, leadership, traditions, and so on, to group their findings. The teacher must also ensure students

understand the task: students will produce a short written brief about the list of items influenced by the African culture that have been identified for grading.

Students:
In their groups, students brainstorm about things they believe have been influenced by African Brazilian culture and produce a plan for disseminating their findings.

Students connect the content to their individual experiences and cultural identities through the open-ended questioning. They research African Brazilian and global Black figures, discuss the context and the struggles these figures faced, and reflect on the broader implications. This not only validates their backgrounds but also encourages critical analysis and meaningful engagement with the topic.

Activity 2: Comparing the data and group discussion (20–30 minutes)

Teachers:
The teacher reads aloud the population statistics (e.g., African Brazilian: 56.1% / African American: 12.6%) displayed in the banner and uses guiding questions to encourage initial observation, spark curiosity, and begin to challenge assumptions:

- What are your first thoughts when you see these numbers?
- Does a larger population mean more representation and equality?
- Why might people of African descent in both Brazil and the USA still face discrimination?

Students:
In their small groups, students analyze and compare the data.

Students compare demographic data and explore how statistics relate to real-world experiences of inequality. Students share insights, build on each other's observations, and form deeper understandings of systemic issues through different perspectives.

Activity 3: Think-share-reflect circle (15–20 minutes)

Teachers:
The teacher uses the following question to prompt students:

- Even in countries with different histories and population sizes (e.g., the USA), Black communities still face similar inequalities. Why do you think this happens?

Each student is then asked to write a short response. Afterward, the class forms a circle for discussion, where every student shares one idea or question with the class.

Students:
In their small groups, students implement research on the Black populations of Brazil and the USA to answer the question proposed by the teacher. They build data literacy and collaborative discussion, laying the foundation for critical thought.

The think-share-reflect circle deepens student capacity to express themselves by combining individual reflection followed by verbal sharing. The circle format fosters a

respectful space for students to express viewpoints, voice doubts, and connect their reflections to broader social realities. At the same time, it builds data literacy and collaborative discussion skills, laying a strong foundation for critical thinking.

Activity 4: Mini debate—real data, real issues (30–40 minutes)

Teachers:
The teacher introduces debate topics for the students, for example:

- Does a larger Afro-descendant population mean more equality?
- Are symbolic celebrations (like Black Awareness Day or Black History Month) enough to fight racism?
- What role should schools play in addressing racial inequality?

The teacher also assigns students to "agree" or "disagree" sides, even if it's not their personal opinion (to foster empathy and argumentation), and suggests a structured debate format, for example:

- Opening statement (1 minute per team)
- Argument round (2–3 minutes each)
- Rebuttal round (1–2 minutes)
- Final thoughts

Students:
Students are required to formulate arguments, consider opposing viewpoints, and articulate evidence-based claims. The structured debate format scaffolds the discussion, giving students a clear framework for expressing and defending ideas while remaining respectful of different perspectives. By assigning debate positions that may differ from students' personal beliefs, the activity fosters empathy and flexibility in thinking.

Activity 5: Closing reflection

Teachers:
The teacher prompts students with reflective questions to guide their thinking:

- What did I learn today about race, representation, and how statistics can help us understand society?
- How can I use my voice to make a difference?

Students:
Students reflect individually or in groups on the questions provided and summarize their responses. These reflections will be compiled into a summary entry for their activity portfolio, expressing both personal insights and collective conclusions about the class.

The closing reflection allows learners to consolidate their experiences and articulate what they've learned about race, representation, and social equity and consider how they might use their voices for advocacy and change. Self-assessment and peer feedback are encouraged to foster metacognition and student agency. This holistic evaluation

process values both the learning journey and the final outcome, reinforcing the core principles of project-based learning.

School involvement:
At the end of the activity, the banner is displayed in the school by the students, creating a space for debate and awareness among other students and teachers from different classrooms.

Tips for carrying out the activity

To implement the "One Day, One Month, a Whole Life with Awareness!" activity effectively in different educational settings, it is essential to adapt it to local contexts, engage students in meaningful discussions, and foster critical thinking. Teachers can tailor the content by highlighting historical and social issues relevant to their country or region. Alternatively, students can research racial demographics and contributions of Afro-descendant populations worldwide, making the discussion more relatable to their environment.

Preparing engaging and accessible materials is key to capturing students' interest. Teachers can use visual aids such as banners, infographics, and posters to help summarize key information effectively, while videos, music, and storytelling make the learning experience dynamic. Teachers should incorporate articles, news reports, and literary excerpts that address race, identity, and human rights from multiple perspectives. Where digital resources are limited, students can create handmade banners or use digital tools such as PowerPoint, Canva, or Google Slides to design virtual presentations.

Creating a safe and inclusive classroom environment is crucial for discussions on race, discrimination, and human rights. Teachers should establish a respectful and open space where students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts without fear of judgment, reinforcing mutual respect and active listening. Teachers should also be prepared to address sensitive topics with historical and legal context, ensuring students engage in factual and well-informed discussions.

5.3 Debating on Politics. An Example From Trento, Italy

Tatiana Arrigoni

5.3.1 Civic and Citizenship Education in Italy

In 2019, a new subject was introduced in the Italian school curricula, *educazione civica* (civic education). One of its main goals is to prepare young people for active and responsible citizenship in a democratic society. The introduction of this subject was accompanied by national guidelines, which were subsequently revised in 2024.

The Italian guidelines prescribe a cross-curricular approach to *educazione civica* and identify three key pillars to structure curricula at the school level and learning pathways at the classroom level:

1. Italian Constitution
2. Economic Development and Sustainability
3. Digital Citizenship

Due to its historical and cultural background, the Province of Trento (Trentino) holds a special political status in Italy, with a large degree of autonomy in many areas, including education. This autonomy influenced how *educazione civica* was implemented in the province. The subject was renamed *educazione civica e alla cittadinanza* (civic and citizenship education) to emphasize its role in creating opportunities for students to actively contribute to community life.

To support this localized approach, special guidelines were developed and issued in August 2020. The Provincial Institute for Educational Research and Experimentation (IPRASE) was tasked with assisting schools in the implementation of these guidelines, providing both technical and pedagogical support.

School: Collegio Arcivescovile Celestino Endrici, Trento, Italy

Civic and citizenship education at Collegio Arcivescovile, Celestino Endrici
Collegio Arcivescovile is a private school in Trento that offers primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education. Due to its private status, the school is relatively small, with a limited number of classes per school year, and pupils per class. Collegio Arcivescovile is explicitly committed to a person-centered approach to teaching and learning, where participation is strongly encouraged at both the classroom and institution levels.

The school is part of a wide network of associations and institutions that are actively involved in community life, both in extracurricular settings and in collaboration with schools. These partnerships support a range of

initiatives, including service-learning activities in Italy and abroad, financial education projects, and contests on civic education topics.

The activity described took place in collaboration with one of these partner institutions, the Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino (the Trentino Historical Museum Foundation), and was supervised by the Provincial Institute for Educational Research and Experimentation. It was jointly implemented by the history and Italian language teachers as part of the class's *educazione civica e alla cittadinanza* (civic and citizenship education) program.

5.3.2 Background Context for the Debate Tournament

The activity was inspired by the debate tournament "A suon di parole," which was first introduced in the Autonomous Province of Trento in 2015 (out of a joint initiative of IPRASE and the University of Trento) with the aim of promoting school debates in the province. Over time, "A suon di parole" has involved hundreds of students from both higher secondary and lower secondary schools in Trentino.

School debates can follow a variety of formats, with the World School Debate or the British Parliamentary Style being the most commonly used. For "A suon di parole," a special format was designed with the specific aim of involving the entire class (coached by one teacher), instead of only a selected group of students. Each participant takes on specific roles according to their individual skills and interests, such as searching for information, formulating and delivering arguments, or carefully listening to opposing views in order to analyze them and respond effectively.

The format was designed to help students develop active listening skills and learn how to mediate between differing perspectives so as to contribute to the development of a culture of dialogue and respect for diversity.

The "A suon di parole" debate session takes place in three phases over the course of one lesson:

1. First round—presentation of arguments:
   Each class presents three prepared arguments (up to 3 minutes each) in support of one of two opposing interpretations of a common issue (e.g., "What is more relevant in fighting climate change: institutional or personal initiative?").

2. Second round—drafting counterarguments:
   During a 20-minute break between the first and third rounds, each class develops reasoned counterarguments in response to the competitor class. The goal is to highlight both the weaknesses and strengths in the opposing team's reasoning.

3. Third round—presentation of counterarguments:
   Each class delivers their counterarguments (up to 3 minutes each), directly addressing and challenging the positions presented in the first round.

A three-member panel adjudicates the debate session based on shared criteria known to the students in advance. These criteria assess both content (e.g., logical structure, wealth, relevance, reliability of information, language use) as well as formal qualities (e.g., oratory, style, persuasiveness).

Teachers in the role of debate coaches also consider additional aspects for evaluation, such as collaboration skills, respect for diversity, and tolerance of ambiguity. Self-evaluation by students is encouraged as a follow-up activity and was also used in the example presented here, allowing learners to reflect on their performance and overall process.

5.3.3 Adapting the Debate Tournament for a Specific Class

The debate activity described here took place in a *terza liceo* class (11th grade) but can be easily adapted for lower classes. Similar activities take place in Trentino in lower secondary schools, from the sixth to the eighth grades, as well as in the 9th and 10th grades of upper secondary schools. The activity was inspired by the "A suon di parole" tournament but was conducted independently, tailored to the specific needs of the single class involved. For the debate session, the class was divided into two groups, which were jointly prepared and trained by both the teachers responsible for the activity. The main goal was to engage students in an in-depth and critical exploration of the institutional structure of the Province of Trento, a territory with a higher degree of political autonomy than other Italian regions, and to prompt reflection on its implications for active citizenship.

Although these topics are part of the *educazione civica e alla cittadinanza* curriculum in the Province of Trento, they are often perceived by young people as difficult and uninteresting. This activity aimed to make the subject matter more accessible and relevant through active participation and debate.

The overall activity was structured as follows:

Preparation (one week):
Teachers provided information on the issues related to the debate topic, and students did further research in groups.

Debate (two weeks):
The debate phase began with the announcement of the motions: "Autonomy in Trentino: a no longer tenable privilege" versus "Autonomy in Trentino: a model to be promoted." Two debating groups were formed, and each was assigned one of the motions. Students then prepared their arguments in advance.

During the debate session, both teams delivered arguments focusing on Trentino's historical heritage and its responsibility for shaping its future political role within broader

national and European contexts. They also developed and presented counterarguments in response to the opposing team's position.

Follow-up session (individual homework after the debate session):
Students filled in a meta-reflection form prepared by the teachers, including questions on how the activity has transformed their knowledge and their views on the issue as well as on their role as Trentino citizens.

A distinctive feature of this activity was the composition of the panel adjudicating the debate. In addition to members of the school staff (other than the teachers responsible), the panel included an expert from the local research center Fondazione Museo Storico del Trentino. This expert provided students with detailed feedback on the arguments they presented, responded to questions raised during both the preparation and debate sessions, and shared additional information about materials and sources on Trentino's autonomy as well as opportunities for political participation.

Throughout all stages of the debate (e.g., preparation, debate session, exchange with the expert, and the follow-up), the teachers closely observed students' work to collect evidence for assessment. The evaluation focused not only on students' knowledge of the specific content and the quality of their argumentation but also on their collaboration skills and the development of self-efficacy.

The activity required no special facilities. The regular classroom was sufficient for both the preparation and the follow-up phases. The debate session took place in the school auditorium, while two separate rooms were allocated to the debating groups for developing their counterarguments.

Tips for carrying out the activity
The debating activity can be easily adapted for different educational contexts. Motions of debate can be formulated to engage younger pupils and prompt them to critically examine citizenship-related issues (e.g., collaboration versus competition in community life, freedom versus control in teenagers' use of digital devices). Each debate can be introduced by a preparation phase (including group work and targeted lectures by teachers), followed by a meta-reflection. This structure supports students in developing a deeper understanding of the issues discussed and greater self-awareness. Where possible, contributions from experts from local institutions should be considered. Engaging with external specialists provides students with an effective way to discover relevant, locally available resources, and offers opportunities for civic action within their communities.

5.4 Let Our Voice Against Gender Violence Be Heard! Flashmob. An Example From Rome, Italy

Tiziana Morgante

School: Istituto Comprensivo Piersanti Mattarella, Rome, Italy

Civic and citizenship education at Istituto Comprensivo Piersanti Mattarella

The Istituto Comprensivo Piersanti Mattarella comprises pre-primary (ages 3 to 6), primary (first to fifth grades), and lower secondary education (sixth to eighth grades).

As part of civic education, the Institute has been implementing the “Girls’ and Boys’ Parliament” project since the 2022/2023 school year. This project was created to stimulate student interest and increase their participation and decision-making related to school activities. To achieve this, representatives from the fourth to eighth grades meet in an assembly where, in cooperation with teachers, they discuss, listen to one another, and make proposals about classroom/school activities. Through these critical discussions and continuous cooperation between peers, they organize projects linked to certain days in the civic calendar.

Before each Parliament session, students discuss with their classmates and decide collectively on the topics they want to address in a project. With the help of the teachers, they often collaborate with local and national organizations (Save the Children, the scouts, the Municipality of Rome,[1] etc.) to develop these initiatives.

During the years, the school has carried out different projects related to the following national and international commemorative days:

- World Water Day (March 22),
- National Day in Memory of Mafia Victims (March 21)
- National Day of Legality (May 23)
- International Holocaust Remembrance Day (January 27)
- World Children’s Day (November 20)
- International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (November 25)

[1] Rome is divided into 15 municipalities (*municipi*) for administrative purposes. Each municipality has a president, chosen by direct election, and a municipal council, consisting of six councilors.

5.4.1 Background of the Flash Mob Project

The students involved in the student parliament expressed great interest in the topic of gender-based violence, as they considered it one of the most unacceptable forms of violence. For this reason, every year the students planned to celebrate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (November 25) with different activities both in the classroom and at the school level.

In 2023, the Parliament suggested organizing a flash mob in the neighborhood. The students expressed a desire to have their voices heard beyond the school walls and asked to do the project in a place common to their everyday lives. The approach used was project-based learning and involved pupils from primary school (fourth grade) to lower secondary school (eighth grade).

5.4.2 The Flash Mob Project

The project aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- to improve students' communication skills;
- to develop students' planning and organizational skills;
- to promote students' sense of autonomy and responsibility; and
- to develop students' problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills.

With the support of the teachers, all classes followed a common structure, but differentiated the work according to the school levels (primary school versus lower secondary school). The activities (listed below) may span across two months of classes, depending on the student's involvement.

Preparatory research activities on the theme:
Primary school: students were involved in workshops on gender-based violence delivered by the nongovernmental organization, Save the Children.

Lower secondary school: students conducted research on the web about femicide in Italy and the victims of violence using different sources (reports, newspaper articles, and statistical sources).

Preparation of materials:
Students created posters in the shape of a red shoe (the symbol against gender-based violence in Italy), displaying thoughts and poems.

Each student created a paper rose or paper flower with a card to give to women in the public they met during the flash mob.

Create a slogan:
All participating classes were tasked with creating a slogan in both Italian and English. Each class was then asked to vote on their favorite slogan, with the most popular selected. The slogan chosen was "For women, respect and love, no more anger, give a flower!" ("Per le donne rispetto e amore, basta rabbia, regalate un fiore!").

The flash mob:
The flash mob took place in a neighborhood square, near the school. The children came out of school and marched into the main square of the neighborhood with red balloons, flowers, and posters. All the students wore red clothing and made a sign on their faces in the same color. Then they stood in a circle occupying the whole square, waited for the signal, and shouted the slogan all together, repeating it several times, and finally, threw the red balloons up in the air.

Numerous people from the neighborhood stopped to observe the flash mob (and several elderly people looked out from balconies to watch), while many others joined the march. Additionally, parents also participated in the flash mob by following their children in the march and forming a circle around the children in the square. At the conclusion of the event, representatives of the municipality made a short speech.

The teachers of all the participating classes met regularly to organize and monitor the activity. They checked students' progress, observed group work, supervised their activities, and provided feedback. The classes often shared and worked on common documents (books, articles, poems) in a continuous exchange between teachers of different subjects. Local authorities (traffic policemen, representatives of the municipality, particularly the president of the municipality and the councilor for educational policy) and the scout group of the local parish were invited to participate in the event.

Tips for carrying out the activity
It is important to first discuss with students a topic that is important to them and that is relevant in today's society. The choice of the topic should be theirs, as this encourages participation, and the teachers' role is to support them through these discussions.

For the flash mob planning, teachers engage their classes in research activities to explore the topic of the project in more depth. They could also involve external organizations and nongovernmental organizations to implement a workshop on the flash mob theme (this kind of activity is especially suitable for primary school students). This process involves close collaboration among teachers to coordinate efforts.

Students should also be given opportunities to work autonomously and in small groups to produce material useful for the flash mob. Teachers can support by organizing meetings with students from different classes to plan the event collaboratively.

If needed, teachers can assist students in communicating their decisions to the wider school community by taking minutes. Student communications must be clear and informative, indicating materials, activities, and deadlines.

Teachers also have a key role in reaching out to local authorities and/or nongovernmental organizations and other external organizations. This can be done either directly or in collaboration with the students.

The flash mob is an activity aimed at communicating a message and raising awareness on a particular issue. The participation of the whole school, or at least several classes in the school, can make the activity more impactful. However, it can also be carried out with just one class, always trying to involve parent participation.

5.5 A Debate on Voting and Elections. An Example From Slovenia

Eva Klemenčič Mirazchiyski

5.5.1 Civic and Citizenship Education in Slovenia

In Slovenia, civic and citizenship education (CCE) is implemented into the curriculum both as a compulsory subject and through an "all-inclusive" approach. Compulsory education in Slovenia follows a unified structure of nine years of primary and lower-secondary education schooling. CCE is delivered in three ways: as a standalone subject; integrated into broader compulsory subjects such as history, geography, and the Slovene language; or as a cross-curricular objective taught by all teachers. Similar approaches to CCE can also be found at the upper secondary level.

For the separate subject approach, there is a compulsory subject, patriotic and citizenship culture and ethics, that is followed in the seventh and eighth grades. This subject is taught for 35 hours per school year, which equals one hour per week. In the ninth grade, students can choose an optional subject titled citizenship culture. However, the elective is only chosen by a small number of students.

The compulsory subject in the seventh grade covers the following four thematic units:

1. The individual, communities, and the state.
2. The community of citizens of the Republic of Slovenia.
3. Slovenia is founded on human rights.
4. Beliefs, religions, and the state.

In the eighth grade, the thematic units are:

1. A closer look at democracy.
2. Finance, work, and the economy.
3. Slovenia, the European Union, and the world.
4. The global community.

The syllabus is the same across Slovenia (although, like all syllabuses at the moment, it is currently being updated). Importantly, Slovenia follows a learning objectives-based

approach. This means learning goals and knowledge standards are prioritized over the topics—at least in principle.

Teachers and schools have autonomy in how they deliver CCE content. However, they are recommended to draw on examples from both the immediate and broader environment (school, local community, etc.). The use of modern teaching methods and approaches is encouraged, with an emphasis on guiding students toward independent and critical thinking. Special emphasis is also placed on individualization and differentiation, as well as cross-curricular integration.

There are no specialist teachers for CCE in Slovenia. The CCE subject is taught by generalist teachers and is graded.

School: OŠ Dobrova, Slovenia

Civic and citizenship education at the primary and lower secondary school, OŠ Dobrova

OŠ Dobrova, located in central Slovenia, comprises the first to ninth grades. It strengthens students' civic learning by creating a democratic learning environment and making considerable use of debate as a teaching method, particularly when addressing civic and citizenship education. Debates are often organized around a statement related to citizenship, with students asked to prepare speeches in support of or against the statement.

Debates are also used beyond classroom practice, during debate tournaments organized by external organizations, such as ZIP Institute (Pro et Contra–Institute for the Culture of Dialogue). An example of a citizenship-related debate statement is "Voting should be mandatory." Through this activity, the focus is not only placed on democratic dialogue and participation within the classroom level but also on fostering engagement in broader civic contexts.

5.5.2 Context for "A Closer Look at Democracy" Theme

"A Closer Look at Democracy" is one of the mandatory thematic units in the eighth grade syllabus for the subject of patriotic and citizenship culture and ethics. When covering the topic of democracy, students are presented with several statements that either reflect the situation in their country or could apply to it. Students are divided into groups, and the activity lasts two school hours. Each group consists of six students. The first hour is dedicated to preparation, followed by the implementation of the activity in the second hour.

5.5.3 A Debate on Voting and Elections

In this activity students practice their public speaking skills and critical thinking.

The objectives of the activity are:

- To understand voting rights and duties.
- To reinforce knowledge about democracy.
- To recognize the importance of secret ballots.
- To learn about the media and the role of election campaigns.

Start of the activity:
Students are divided into four groups, for which the teacher presents four statements:

1. Voting should be mandatory.
2. The voting age should be from age 16.
3. Voting should be public.
4. All candidates should be given equal media time for their campaigns.

Preparation (one lesson):
Students prepare to either defend or argue against the statement. They must research the arguments that support the statement as well as those that oppose it. During this process, the teacher acts as a mentor, ensuring that students incorporate the knowledge standards prescribed by the syllabus. Students are also encouraged to critically assess the reliability of the information found. Starting from the original online sources, they check additional sites on the same topic or claim, practicing techniques such as click restraint and opening new tabs to compare perspectives, both horizontally and vertically. Students have to keep track of their *critical reading* strategies by taking notes on how they searched and analyzed the reliability of the information. These insights are then discussed in a follow-up session after the debate, focused on the processes activated during the activity.

Debate (one lesson):
Students defend their side and aim to present stronger arguments than the opposing team. While debate tournaments follow a specific format, in the classroom the approach must be adapted to fit within one lesson.

During the debate, the teacher acts as a moderator and timekeeper. Each of the four groups is divided into two teams.

- The first speaker from the defending team defines key terms and presents two to three arguments (3 minutes).
- The first speaker from the opposing team then presents their arguments in the same way (3 minutes).
- The second speaker from the defending team builds on their team's arguments and refutes the opposing team's points (2 minutes).
- The second speaker from the opposing team does the same (2 minutes).

- Finally, the third speakers on both sides summarize key points of contention and deliver closing statements (2 minutes each).

One group's debate lasts about 20 minutes. Since there are four debate statements in total, two of them can be presented within one class hour (taking about 45 minutes).

Tips for carrying out the activity

When implementing this activity, it is important to support students in searching for and developing well-founded arguments. These arguments should not be based solely on personal opinions but must be supported with concrete data and real evidence. Where relevant, they should also align with the objectives of the school subject in which the activity is being conducted.

The activity is very engaging for students, can be applied to a variety of topics, and is easily adaptable to different school contexts. Choosing an appropriately challenging topic is crucial: it should be challenging enough to require research and critical thinking but not so difficult that it becomes overwhelming. The activity is also suitable for other civic and citizenship education-related themes such as globalization, global issues, environmental challenges, and many others.

This activity combines two key strategies for civic and citizenship education—lateral reading apprenticeship for civic online reasoning and debate—and highlights their interconnections, depending on the chosen topic. Additionally, elements of cooperative learning can be incorporated to further enhance collaboration and peer interaction.

5.6 A Classroom Role-Play Activity: Understanding the Social Ladder. An Example From The Netherlands

Remmert Daas

5.6.1 Civic and Citizenship Education in the Netherlands

Promoting citizenship and social cohesion is an official requirement for primary and secondary schools in the Netherlands. Citizenship education should (at least) be aimed at

- promoting respect for and knowledge of fundamental democratic values;
- promoting social and citizenship competences; and
- promoting knowledge of and respect for diversity and equality.

Schools in tertiary vocational education are also required to teach citizenship, the legal contents of which are currently undergoing revision. Schools in the Netherlands

generally have relatively high autonomy in planning citizenship education (Schulz et al., 2025), provided they abide by legislation and work towards the broadly framed national learning aims. The objectives of citizenship education are considered a responsibility of the whole school throughout primary, secondary, and vocational education. However, citizenship education is most strongly tied to social subjects, particularly civics (Nieuwelink & Oostdam). Civics is a mandatory one-year course in upper secondary education, which teaches knowledge about society and reasoning skills. Schools in vocational education typically offer the subject citizenship. The Netherlands has a tracked education system: the upper secondary vocational track spans the ninth and 10th grades (ages 14 to 16); the upper secondary general track spans grades the 10th and 11th grades (ages 15 to 17); and the upper secondary academic track spans the 10th through 12th grades (ages 15 to 18). Students from the vocational track generally move on to vocational education, spanning the 11th to 12th or 13th grades. The contents of civics education differ between tracks, though the general aims overlap. For more information on citizenship education in the Netherlands, see De Groot et al. (2022).

School: ID College, Leiden, the Netherlands

Civic and citizenship education at ID College, Leiden

ID College (currently mboRijnland) was a school for vocational education (11th to 13th grades) with approximately 10,000 students over multiple locations and cities in the west of the Netherlands. The activity described here was taught at a school in Leiden to students in the 11th grade (ages 16 and 17) enrolled in a program for social care. The activity described below was taught within the context of the subject of citizenship, which all students attended as a mandatory course with weekly lessons. Citizenship was not formally tied to professional training or internships, but the teacher did make it a point to regularly address students in their role as future practitioners in social care.

5.6.2 Simulating the Social Ladder

According to data from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2022, role-play appears to be used relatively little in citizenship education (Schulz et al., 2025). This makes it worthwhile to consider what a role-play activity might look like in practice. The activity described here aims to visualize the notions of social standing and social stratification. It is designed to help students explore the notions of social standing and social stratification. Through simulation, students experience what it means to occupy different social positions. The activity also includes guided reflection, where

students are invited to share their perspectives on the implications of these differences and critically examine their viewpoints.

The activity is designed for a group of approximately 25 students (the maximum number of students is tied to the size of the room). Preparation time with students takes approximately 10 minutes, followed by role-play and in-class discussion, which take about 15 minutes, and a final 10 minutes for reflection. The activity was designed for students aged 16.

At the start of the activity, all students are randomly assigned a role with different social status (i.e., their "character"). The activity aims to let students experience how people in society are differently positioned in terms of the resources they have access to. To make these differences tangible, students start at one end of the classroom, all looking the same way. The teacher calls out 25 questions. If a student's character would answer "yes," they take a step forward, and if the character would answer "no," the student stays where they are. This way, after 25 questions, students end up at very different positions on the "social ladder." After the activity, students reflect on their attitudes towards these differences and the possible role the government might take in dealing with these differences.

(Example character descriptions and role-play questions are included at the end of the example).

Activity learning aims:

- Students can explain the meaning of social standing.
- Students can express their attitudes towards social inequality and the role of government in providing social services.
- Students can reflect on their beliefs about the extent to which society facilitates equality of opportunity.

Preparation:
The teacher explains the purposes of the activity to the students: experiencing and learning about different social positions people in society have, reflecting on what that means in terms of inequality, and discussing the government's response to those differences. To achieve this, all students are randomly handed a character description that should not be shared with their peers.

The teacher gives all students a card that briefly describes a person's characteristics (e.g., age, occupation, etc.). The teacher asks students not to share their role and take some time to think about their character's background: *Where do you live? What does a typical day or week look like for you? Do you have a lot of friends? How much money do you have?* Etc.

Role-play:
When students have gotten into character, they stand shoulder to shoulder at one end of the classroom. The teacher informs the students that 25 questions are going to be called out (e.g., *do you have little trouble finding a job? Are you able to buy a home*?). If the students' character would answer "yes" to that question, they take a step forward;

otherwise, they stay in place. If students aren't sure what to answer, they answer what they think would be most likely. When students have answered the final question, they stay in their position for the discussion.

Discussion:

The teacher asks questions to students standing in different positions in the classroom: *What did it feel like to move all the way to the front? What did it feel like to stay all the way in the back? What roles did the students who answered "no" most of the time have? What characteristics did the students who answered "yes" most of the time have?* Gradually, the questions are directed more to the notions of social standing in society: *Do students also see these differences in society around them? How do people arrive at these different positions? What should the role of government be in relation to these differences?*

Reflection:

After the lesson, students individually complete an assignment in which they are asked to reflect on the activity and what it represents. Questions two to eight are about their own views and not those of their character:

1. What role did you play in the social ladder game?
2. Do you think you took enough steps? Why?
3. What did you think of the difference in the number of steps between the different roles?
4. Consider differences.
   a) Do you also see these differences in society around you? Are these differences large?
   b) Do you think these differences are fair? Explain why you think so.
5. What positive consequences can social differences have?
6. What negative consequences can social differences have?
7. How do you think you should act toward people at the top or bottom of the social ladder? Explain your answer.
8. How do you think the government should act toward people at the top or bottom of the social ladder? Explain your answer.

Tips for carrying out the activity

The simulation of a social ladder activity was designed to be carried out in upper-secondary or vocational education (i.e., students aged 15 or older). To facilitate younger students, teachers could consider using character descriptions that are more familiar to their age and use fewer and more simplified questions for the activity.

The characters students are assigned should reflect people who clearly take different social positions in society. At the same time, there is a risk of reinforcing stereotypes students may hold about certain (groups of) people.

Teachers should be aware of this and assess during the activity whether this calls for attention.

The characters and questions included, although adapted, reflect relevant policies in the Netherlands. To implement the activity in other countries, teachers should consider what social groups, viewpoints, or issues are relevant to their context.

5.6.3 Acknowledgements

The activity was taught by Malty Mahadew, a former civics teacher in Dutch vocational education. The lesson is based on an example provided in the *Handbook for Teaching Civics* by Olgers et al. (2014), in which the original design is attributed to Wanda Hoogenhout, a civics teacher in Dutch secondary education. The reflection assignment was designed by Remmert Daas as part of his dissertation on assessment of citizenship competences.5.5.4 References

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Example character descriptions and role-play questions for the role-play classroom activity from the Netherlands

Character descriptions:

- You are 18 years old and just graduated from secondary school.
- You are a 22-year-old male and you are studying at university. Your parents are both from Morocco.
- You are a 35-year-old successful businessman.
- You are a 24-year-old male, an Orthodox Muslim in traditional clothing.
- You are a 35-year-old beautician. You and your partner both have steady jobs.
- You are 38 years old, working part-time for the municipality. Together with your husband, who works at the bank, you have a 3-year-old son.
- You are 17 years old and an orphan (your parents are deceased).
- You are a tax advisor, and you have been looking for a job for a year and a half because you are unemployed.
- You are 45 years old and working as a journalist.
- You are a member of the House of Representatives for the Freedom Party.
- You are the director of a large international company, 4,000 people working for you.
- You are a 28-year-old man who has been struggling with alcohol addiction for a number of years. You have a temporary job as a garbage man.
- You are a 17-year-old girl who has become pregnant. The relationship with the child's father has ended. You live with your parents in an apartment.
- You are a single father with three children. You work as a branch manager at Mediamarkt.
- You are a principal of a secondary school.
- You are a 29-year-old car mechanic.
- You are a single mother of two children. You earn your money as an artist occasionally selling paintings.
- You are a 30-year-old social studies teacher who has just been diagnosed with a muscular disease.
- You are a 16-year-old. Both your parents were born in Morocco. You have dropped out of school and are unemployed. You meet your friends on the street.
- You are a 21-year-old student who lives in a rented room. You have a part-time job in a café.
- You are a 15-year-old secondary school student with good grades. Both of your parents work full-time.
- You are a 16-year-old girl who is physically disabled.
- You have just had your first child and are partially incapacitated for work due to medical complications during childbirth.
- You are a 28-year-old young man who works as a call center agent.
- You are a 23-year-old young illegal asylum seeker.
- You are a 58-year-old general practitioner.
- You are a 27-year-old furniture maker with a concentration disorder.
- You are a 84-year-old chronically ill lady. Your husband is deceased.

- You are a creative person who has been unemployed for 3 months, and you are offered a job as a store clerk.
- You are a 65-year-old bicycle repairman who is about to retire.
- You did not finish secondary school, and you now work as a deputy manager in a supermarket. You are 19 years old.
- You are a 61-year-old immigrant. You are unemployed.
- You are a 50-year-old and homeless.

Questions:

- Is it easy for you to find a job?
- Do you own a computer or laptop?
- Do you have friends who can help you find a job?
- Can your parents pay for your studies so that you do not have any student debt?
- Do you receive financial support, for example, a student loan?
- Do you have a secondary school diploma?
- Are you eligible for benefits for single parents?
- Do you ever donate money to charity?
- Sometimes, people don't get invited to job interviews because of their surname. Does that apply to you?
- Can you buy a house?
- Do you receive a subsidy from the municipality to pay for a sports subscription?
- Are you entitled to unemployment benefits?
- Can you support yourself if you become unemployed for more than a year?
- If you become ill for a long period of time, can you continue to pay your bills?
- If your child becomes disabled, can you provide the necessary care?
- Can you understand the letters you receive from public services?
- Is it financially feasible for you to have one or more children?
- Do you have access to good social and medical facilities?
- Do you have to worry about your own financial situation and future?
- If you were to lose your job, can you continue to live in your house?
- Can you go on holiday twice a year?
- Does the government pay for the costs of a necessary (medical) operation?
- Do you have to worry about finding work?
- Do you have a healthy lifestyle?
- Can you pay your housing costs and have enough money to do something fun every now and then?
- Do people generally have a positive image of you and the group you belong to?

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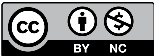

Glossary

Civic knowledge (in ICCS)
In the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), civic knowledge includes not only students' capacity to recall information but extends beyond this to include their "ability to reason with and apply their knowledge" (Schulz et al., 2023, p. 26)[1]. The scope of civic knowledge, as assessed in ICCS, includes students' capacities to apply knowledge to concrete situations and to concepts associated with democratic values across a range of contexts.

Civic Knowledge Scale in ICCS 2022
In the ICCS 2022 Civic Knowledge Scale, the proficiency levels represent a hierarchy of civic knowledge with increasing sophistication in content knowledge and cognitive processes. Increasing levels on the scale typically represent increasingly complex content and cognitive processes, as they are demonstrated through student performance. However, it is important to note that all levels of this scale can include content related to both cognitive domains (knowing as well as reasoning and applying), and that the progression is not simply an extension from simple content knowledge at the bottom to reasoning and application at the top. The sophistication of demonstrable achievement assessed in any given item is a result of the interaction between the civic and citizenship content and the cognitive process applied to that content.

Civic engagement
In ICCS, the concept of civic engagement reflects the idea that civic communities benefit from the active engagement of their citizens. Civic communities have a responsibility to create conditions that facilitate and promote active citizenship, while citizens, in turn, share the responsibility to participate and contribute to their civic communities.

Competence
Competence is defined as a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes appropriate to the context. Key competences are those that all individuals need for personal fulfillment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion, and employment. Competences are developed in a lifelong learning perspective, from early childhood throughout adult life, and through formal, non-formal, and informal learning in all contexts, including family, school, workplace, neighborhoods, and other communities.

Diversity
The increasing diversity of student populations is a global educational trend that presents both challenges and opportunities for schools and other educational institutions. This diversity can add an extra level of complexity to teaching and learning but also provides opportunities for building multicultural and inclusive schools.

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[1] Schulz, W., Fraillon, J., Losito, B., Agrusti, G., Ainley, J., Damiani, V., & Friedman, T. (2023). *IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2022 assessment framework*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-20113-4

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V. Damiani (ed.), *Experiencing Democracy in the Classroom*, IEA Research for Educators 3, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-25449-8

The concept of diversity encompasses a wide range of socially ascribed or perceived differences, such as sex, age, ethnic/social origin, language, religion, nationality, economic condition, or special learning needs.

Experiential learning

According to the concept of experiential learning, the learning process takes place through action and the experimentation of situations, tasks, and roles in which the learner—as an active protagonist—mobilizes their own resources and competences to develop and/or reorganize theories and concepts aimed at achieving a specific goal.

Experiential learning is linked to the pedagogical approaches and methods that promote students' active engagement in experience, analysis, reflection, and collaboration—both among peers and in their interactions with teachers. It therefore encompasses approaches that focus simultaneously on the learning process and on the outcomes of teaching.

Formative assessment

Formative assessment is a planned ongoing process that can take place at any time during teaching and learning. It provides regular, frequent feedback about how students are progressing. The evidence collected through formative assessment is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, students, or their peers to make decisions about subsequent steps in instruction and learning. Such decisions are likely to be better, or better informed, than those made in the absence of such elicited evidence.

Inclusiveness

The concept of inclusiveness reflects the idea that communities (including schools) have a responsibility to ensure that all members feel valued and supported.

(Open) classroom climate

Classroom climate refers to the instructional environment in which students and teachers operate and interact daily.

An open classroom climate is where students can openly discuss political and social issues and have their views respected. Exposure to diverse perspectives helps students deepen their understanding and develop their own political viewpoints. An open classroom climate that promotes democratic values enhances students' appreciation of democracy and supports their active engagement with its principles.

School culture

School culture refers to the collective values, beliefs, norms, and traditions that define how members of a school community interact, behave, and function together. It encompasses both the explicit and implicit expectations that guide daily life, reflected in the school's vision, symbols, language, and the relationships among staff and students. A strong and positive school culture fosters a supportive environment that promotes both academic achievement and social-emotional growth for all members of the community.

School (democratic) governance

In this book, school governance refers broadly to school leadership, including both its

practical and ideological aspects. The term *democratic* indicates that school governance is based on human rights values and emphasizes the empowerment and active involvement of students, staff and stakeholders in all key school decisions.

Teaching strategies
A teaching strategy is any planned approach or method used by teachers to promote learning. It implies selecting and organizing instructional activities, materials, and techniques to facilitate students' learning. An effective teaching strategy is multidimensional and flexible, depending on the context in which it is applied.

Whole-school approach (to civic and citizenship education)
A whole-school approach to civic and citizenship education involves the active engagement and shared commitment of all stakeholders in a school community. Because school life is multifaceted, this approach considers at least three interconnected areas essential for nurturing democratic culture and developing learners' competences for democratic participation: teaching and learning, school governance and culture, and co-operation with the wider community.