

## *Civic education when democracy is in flux: The impact of empirical research on policy and practice in Latin America.*

FERNANDO REIMERS, Harvard University[1]

*ABSTRACT* This paper examines the impact of the IEA International Civic Education Study on policy and practice in Latin America. It documents significant influence on curriculum revision in the two countries that participated, Chile and Colombia, as well as indirect impact in regional policy discussions. The provision of solid comparative descriptive analysis of nationally representative samples of students was especially influential. The article describes the integration of Latin American education policy leaders in international professional networks in citizenship education. It discusses the limited impact of these studies on teaching practice and school culture. This can be attributed first, to the study's organization along the top down institutional lines that also characterize policy making in Latin America, which may have lessened impact on teacher education institutions or teacher organizations, and second to the design of the study, which could not assess the contribution of specific programs of citizenship education to civic knowledge and skills.

### **Introduction**

This paper examines the politics and policies relating to the reform of civic education in Latin America during the last decade. I review in particular the impact on policy and practice of the IEA Civic Education Study (abbreviated CIVED) in Chile and Colombia, and in other countries in the region, and discuss some ongoing challenges in the study of citizenship education and their implications for research utilization and impact on practice.

The IEA Civic Education Study contributed to focusing attention on citizenship education as a purpose of instruction particularly in the two countries where students were surveyed in 1999-2000, Chile and Colombia. It also contributed to the expansion of understanding regarding civic education from a narrow definition focused on the acquisition of factual knowledge about the institutions and processes of government, to a broader definition that incorporates the ability to utilize knowledge (skills), as well as to participate and engage in various organizations and the broader community. It moved the field from a focus on the opportunity to learn in a single curriculum subject, to a more encompassing view of opportunity to learn through multiple subjects of instruction and school culture (Torney-Purta, Lehman, Oswald, & Schultz, 2001, p.176).

The reports generated from the study directly contributed to curriculum revision and, in the case of Colombia, to advancing an interest in student learning outcomes (knowledge and skills) as essential to discussions about educational quality. The

reports also contributed indirectly to regional policy dialogue about civic education. They were often cited in reports and conferences convened to discuss the civic purposes of schools as among the few empirical studies documenting students' skills and knowledge. The study contributed least to discussions of programs and pedagogies largely because the survey instruments were not designed to assess the relative effectiveness of modalities of civic education. A major contribution of the study was to set the stage for the next IEA international study of civic education (ICCS) in which six countries of Latin America are participating with testing taking place in 2009 and in which there will be a Latin American module with questions designed to address regional issues.

The study had its impact through two principal mechanisms. The first was the generation of comparative descriptive empirical knowledge. The second mechanism was the professional development and integration of key individuals into educational networks. These individuals then took a prominent role in reforms in civic education in their countries. A series of contextual conditions in the region, including a growing emphasis on educational quality and student assessment, facilitated this process.

In recent years, two factors have encouraged attention to citizenship education. The first is a growing interest in the stability of democracy in the region. The second is a renewed attention to consolidating institutions that permit a transition from electoral democracy towards democracy as a way of life. International institutions and professional networks of educators have played central roles in supporting initiatives to sustain interest in democratic citizenship education.

### **Political context and shifts in Latin America.**

During the last twenty years Latin America has experienced significant political change. The early 1980s marked a return to democratic rule for the majority of Latin American nations, which had experienced periods of military rule. Before 1978 only Colombia, Costa Rica and Venezuela elected their leaders through competitive and free elections. Between 1978 and 1990 democratic transitions took place in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay (Payne, et al. 2007). With the exception of Cuba all Latin American nations have had competitive elections since this most recent democratic transition. Civil freedoms, human rights and democratic institutions have expanded since these transitions in most countries, with the exceptions of Cuba and Venezuela. The impact of recent presidential elections in Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela on democratic institutions is still an open question.

Increased political participation and representation have brought new questions about the way to deepen democracy, in the sense of moving from electoral democracy to democracy as a way of life (UNDP 2004). This is particularly true in the Latin American context in which deep seated economic and social institutions reproduce high levels of social inequality and poverty. Public opinion polls in the region reveal high levels of dissatisfaction with democratic institutions, and limited support for democracy as a form of government. While slightly more than half of the population prefers democracy over other kind of governments, such support has been declining. About a third of the population thinks either authoritarian government is better or that there is no difference between types of government. Of particular interest are the tradeoffs that Latin Americans make between freedom and economic security. In Mexico, for instance, 60% of the population prefers

democracy over other form of government; however, 67% of the population would not mind an authoritarian government if it was able to address the economic needs of the population (Latinobarometro, 2004).

More than half of the population in Latin America believes that politics are so complicated that they can't understand them (Latinobarometro 2005). Participation in political activities, beyond electoral participation, is infrequent. On average in Latin America only 27% of those surveyed talk about politics with friends, 19% work for an issue that affects them or their community, 17% try to convince someone of their political ideas and 6% work or have worked for a political party or candidate (Latinobarometro 2005). Of particular interest is that 29% percent of the younger generation (ages 16 to 29) have non-democratic orientations (UNDP 2004). Given that the great majority of the population is young, these attitudes toward democracy are consequential for the future of democracy in the region.

Current issues with significant consequences for democratic citizenship include: first, persistent poverty and inequality, which constrain the opportunities for social and economic participation for large segments of the population; second, the reappearance of authoritarian forms of government in a few countries in Latin America, constraining open political competition; third, the fact that Venezuela, one of the States now exhibiting a return to authoritarianism is using its vast oil resources to facilitate the acceptance of those practices domestically as well as to support like-minded regimes elsewhere in the region; fourth, the expansion of criminality and violence associated with drug trafficking, which undermines the rule of law and of democratic institutions in some countries in the region; and, fifth the persistence of various forms of capture of public institutions to serve the private interests of political parties, politicians, bureaucrats or unions and other forms of corruption which undermine the effectiveness of social service provision and the trust of the public in public institutions.

### **Educational contexts in Latin America and major reform initiatives.**

Public schools in Latin America were established in the early 1900s, but high levels of educational inequality continue to reproduce high levels of social and economic inequality. The approximately 40% of the population that is poor in Latin America has initial access to elementary instruction, but usually in schools of low quality, which leads many children to drop out. Access to secondary education is constrained and only the most privileged attend higher education (Reimers 2006).

During the 1980s the education systems in the region suffered the impact of economic adjustment resulting from large macro-economic imbalances, and a debt crisis. This constrained the level of education funding, limiting educational expansion and the improvement of education quality (Reimers 1991). The 1990s represented an inflection point marked by a consensus among policy elites on the importance of improving the quality of education to increase countries' economic competitiveness. Some countries in the region used education to strengthen democratic citizenship. A milestone was the 1992 publication of a report by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America, 'Education and knowledge: Basic pillars of changing production patterns with social equity'. Its central thesis was that in order to enhance economic competitiveness in ways consistent with political democratization and growing social equity, it was necessary to modernize education. Specific proposals focused on increasing resources to education, decentralizing educational management and increasing educational accountability (United Nations. ECLAC. 1992).

In the early 1990s most countries of Latin America advanced education reforms along the lines suggested in the UN ECLAC document. Education expenditures increased and governance was decentralized. In some cases nations transferred responsibilities to states or municipalities, in other cases they experimented with school based management. Many countries established national testing systems. Education quality was increasingly understood as reflected in student learning assessments based on the curriculum. Paradoxically, concerns with the content of the curriculum, the preparation of instructional materials, pedagogy, and teacher preparation were by-products and not central to these reforms.

Consistent with this emphasis on student academic achievement as an indication of quality, most countries in the region developed national systems of assessment, and a few participated in international studies of achievement. In 1995 Argentina, Colombia and Mexico participated in the Third Mathematics and Science Study. Chile began to participate in TIMSS in 1999 and El Salvador and Honduras participated in 2007 (<http://nces.ed.gov/timss/countries.asp>).

In 1997, UNESCO's regional office for education in Latin America organized the Latin American Laboratory for the Assessment of the Quality of Education, which assessed the literacy and math skills of third and fourth grade students in thirteen countries. In 2006 there was a follow-up study in eleven of these countries and four additional ones. The growing interest in the assessment of student knowledge and in international comparisons facilitated the participation of Chile and Colombia in the IEA Civic Education Study which took place starting in 1994 with case studies of civic education in twenty-four countries, followed by testing of nationally representative samples of 14-year-old students in 1999 (28 countries) and of upper secondary students in 2000 (16 countries). This participation in comparative studies complemented the growing use of national assessment systems to inform policy making. In Colombia, for instance, the definition of national standards and the implementation of a system of student assessment in the early 2000s was a cornerstone of policies aimed at improving education quality. The assessment of civic knowledge and skills remains an integral part of these reforms. In Chile, a national system of student assessment has existed since the late 1980s. Since 1990 it has been used for policy purposes, initially to target the schools where students had the lowest levels of student achievement and subsequently to assess the impact of various interventions targeted to the improvement of educational quality.

### **Civic education and the IEA studies.**

The overall results of the IEA study of Civic Education for 14-year-olds were released in March of 2001 (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, and Schulz, 2001) and for upper secondary students were released in July of 2002 (Amadeo, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Husfeldt, and Nikolova, 2002). These results allowed for comparison across countries of student knowledge and skills in a range of core concepts about democracy. Chilean and Colombian students were at the bottom of the distribution of scores from 28 countries testing 14-year-olds and the average scores in these two countries were significantly below the international mean (Torney-Purta, et.al., 2001). A detailed analysis of the data from Chile, Colombia, Portugal and the United States (including an examination of responses to individual items) was funded by the Organization of American States and conducted by Torney-Purta and Amadeo (2004). The deficits in civic knowledge were of approximately the same size among the lower secondary and the upper secondary students, suggesting that

the problems may lie in the education provided before the age of 14 and may include deficits in reading comprehension of complex texts, as well as in content knowledge.

To give one example, only half of the students in Chile correctly answered a question about who should govern in a democracy by choosing “popularly elected officials” (many students choosing instead the incorrect answer that experts in politics ought to govern). A reasonable proportion of students in Colombia were able to answer questions about the ideal features of democracy (on some questions a higher percentage than in Chile). The Colombian students, however, performed very poorly when questions dealt with the rights of citizens to dissent, or with dictatorships and non-democratic government. Chilean also students scored very poorly when questions required understanding these threats to democracy (Torney-Purta, 2005, Torney-Purta and Amadeo 2004). The results of the IEA Study also showed that youth in Colombia and Chile did not trust their national government institutions, though they expressed a higher level of trust in their schools than students in many other countries. The study found that, in spite of relatively low levels of knowledge and skill, the majority of young people in these countries participated in community and solidarity groups, even as they expressed distrust and detachment from formal political institutions (Torney-Purta and Amadeo 2004).

A survey including and augmenting the publicly released questions of the IEA study administered in Mexico in 2002 found that less than half of the respondents understood that in a democracy popularly elected representatives should govern (Guevara and Tirado 2006). Equally low was the knowledge of the Constitution, the function of civic organizations and of laws, the ability to identify corruption, the function of regularly held elections, political parties, or Congress. These authors found that nearly 90% of students confused the different levels of government. Further, 53% agreed with the statement: “if the law is against your interests it is legitimate not to abide by it”.

The CIVED Study in Chile and Colombia has directly impacted the professional development of individuals who have subsequently played leading roles in advancing efforts to strengthen civic education. This increased professional capacity resulted from the direct experience of organizing the research to meet IEA’s criteria, but also from engagement in the international network of scholars that participated in the study. In Chile, the national director of curriculum was an active participant in meetings convened by the IEA and other international organizations (Cox, 2003). He both contributed to and learned from this cross-national enterprise. He played a leading role in the design of a new curriculum of civic education. The new curriculum was not directly informed by the results of the study because it was designed between 1996 and 1999, and the results of CIVED were only available in 2001. An examination of the poor performance of Chilean students did generate awareness among top ministry officials that they had failed to modify the 1981 curriculum of civic education in a timely fashion. The targeted analysis of the CIVED results conducted by Torney-Purta and Amadeo (2004) did have direct influence on the proposals developed by the Commission of Citizenship Education established in 2004. The significant curriculum changes the Commission recommended have not yet been implemented, however [2].

In Colombia, a senior national advisor to the Minister of Education on citizenship education, and a leader spearheading numerous initiatives to advance citizenship education in the country, was involved with the IEA team after 2001 and is involved in the design of the current ICCS. The most direct impact of the IEA CIVED Study in Colombia was in the development of the national system of assessment for civic education, rather than in the redesign of curriculum. When

asked what impact the study had in Colombia, the current national coordinator of citizenship education reported:

*[The study] taught us how to assess and has influenced many of the assessments we have developed in Colombia. It is at the basis of how we defined citizenship competencies. However, few people talk about the study in Colombia... Those who know about the study include the professionals in the testing agency, but not the teachers. (Rosario Jaramillo. Personal Communication. May 2007).*

The impact of the study has been mostly at the policy level, and so in spite of growing interest in citizenship education in Latin America little has changed in classroom practice in this area. Challenges to the pedagogy of civic education exist in most countries in the region. In Mexico, a recent study of students in their senior year of high school showed that while 24 percent of the students indicate that they liked the Spanish language course very much; only 13 percent responded positively for the civics course (Guevara and Tirado 2006).

In addition to its direct impact in capacity building, curriculum revision and development of civic education assessment systems in the two participating countries, the IEA Civic Education Study provided empirical grounding to numerous policy discussions across Latin America about the need to explicitly focus on the civic purposes of schools. As the only study to have directly measured civic knowledge and skills using a comparative framework, the IEA study remains a singularly important referent in discussions about the cognitive dimensions of civic education (and to some extent about attitudes).

As would be expected, impact of the study has been smaller in the countries which did not participate. The reports contributed more to establishing the case for explicit attention to civic education, especially focusing on students' civic knowledge and skills, than to discussions about particular approaches to advance civic knowledge or engagement. The study was not designed to establish the 'value added' by teachers and schools in the civic knowledge and skills of their students, nor was it designed to assess the impact of specific programs or approaches to civic education. Thus its impact has been limited in stimulating specific interventions at the classroom level, and in closing the gap between policy and practice. Most of the impact of the study was with policy elites and with highly specialized education communities, not with the vast majority of teachers, teacher educators or the larger public. This may reflect the top down nature of institutions and processes of educational reform in Latin America. It may also be a result of IEA's emphasis on studying nationally representative samples rather than sampling in a way to make it possible to contrast specific policies or pedagogies. Further, the Colombian coordinators were unable to administer the teacher questionnaire, meaning that data from teachers was available in only one Latin American country. There has been limited observable impact of the study in teacher discourse about pedagogy or practice in civic-related subjects.

## Recent developments in citizenship education and impact of CIVED.

### Colombia

In the early 2000's the Ministry of Education of Colombia undertook a long-term national program to develop citizenship and conflict resolution competencies, based on earlier small scale experiences in Bogotá. An aim of the program was to shift teaching of 'civic education' from an isolated subject in the curriculum (which had been in place for several years without much effect) towards organizing schools and instruction in all subjects in ways that continuously promote the development of democratic values and skills. The program involves defining standards, evaluating citizenship competencies, organizing training workshops throughout the country, organizing regional and national forums to identify successful teaching experiences including those coming from universities and nongovernmental organizations, promoting citizenship education for university students, and offering structured programs to promote citizenship. In the development of these programs, the Ministry combines a top-down strategy with identifying effective local efforts and disseminating them.

The Ministry has been putting together case studies of students learning to cooperate with each other to show teachers how others have resolved conflicts peacefully. With support from the program "Business Leaders for Education" (*Fundacion Empresarios por la Educacion*) the Ministry compiled case studies and engaged journalists in their dissemination. The Ministry then made use of reflections generated by teachers at regional workshops and connected them with the work of national and international researchers. In turn, the educators and researchers developed texts on these issues, and suggested ways to implement them. This resulted in 32 structured programs, including publications, methodologies and pedagogical proposals. Workshops were held in seven Colombian cities (including Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín) to create a *diálogo de saberes* [knowledge dialogue] to allow educators to gather reality based experiences with structured pedagogical programs based on research (Cox, Jaramillo and Reimers 2006).

The development of standards of citizenship competencies sought a change in behaviour. This meant acquiring knowledge and also engaging in action based on that knowledge. The focus is on cognitive, emotional, communicational and integrative competencies which allow citizens to act in constructive ways in a democratic society, enabling them to live together peacefully while valuing the human rights of all.

### Chile

Civic education has been taught as a separate subject in the curriculum in Chile since 1912. The focus has been on providing knowledge in law, politics and economics, along with values that promote the common good. Civic education was typically taught in the last grades of elementary and secondary instruction. In 1967 a curriculum reform replaced civic education with an introduction to economics and politics in the subject of social studies and history.

During the 1980's the military dictatorship, that ruled Chile from 1973 to 1990, re-established civic education as a separate secondary subject. However, the emphasis was not on developing democratic citizenship knowledge or skills. When the IEA CIVED test was administered in Chile in 1999, 8th grade curricula still

reflected the programs of study developed during the military government... About a third of the questions in the test covered topics not addressed in any of the school curricula in Chile. Table 1 presents the knowledge items in the test that were not covered in the curriculum in 1999. Chilean students scored significantly below their counterparts in the rest of the world on the topics referring to human rights, the purpose of political parties, who governs in a democracy, the purpose of having periodic elections and what characterizes a democratic government.

**Table 1. Performance of Chilean students and of students from the international samples on knowledge items in the IEA Civic Education Study (CIVED 1999)**

Question in IEA test	International Percent of Correct Answers ( 28 countries)	Chilean Percentage of Correct Answers
Purpose of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights	77%	62%
Most serious threat to democracy	72%	57%
Illegal action of a political organization	59%	41%
Purpose of having more than one political party	75%	60%
Who governs in a democracy	71%	53%
What makes a government non-democratic	53%	44%
Result of monopoly of the press	57%	40%
Necessary condition for democracy	65%	61%
Most convincing action to foster democracy	54%	37%
Purpose of periodic elections	42%	16%

Source: Mineduc, Unidad de Currículum y Evaluación (1999). Análisis curricular estudio Internacional de Educación Cívica. 8º Básico. Cited in Ministerio de Educación. Chile. Formación Ciudadana en el Currículo de la Reforma. 2004.

In 1997 the democratic government elected in 1990 began to modify the curriculum of grades 1 through 4. It was not until 2002 that all eight grades of basic instruction had a curriculum with a clear emphasis on democratic citizenship. Between 1990 and 1996 the Ministry of Education launched several programs to foster democratic citizenship, such as a Program of Democracy and Human Rights and a Program of Environmental Studies, in addition to fostering the operation of student centers as aspects of school governance.

The core objective of the current citizenship education curriculum is for students to develop into free and socially responsible men and women, competent in the practices of citizenship. Within the area of knowledge, the emphasis is on democracy, including concepts of citizenship, democratic institutions, sovereignty, legislation, and the characteristics of civic participation. Human rights, including



the history of how they have come to be defined, their presence in national policies, international human right treaties, and how human rights relate to the rule of law in democracy are considered. The curriculum also focuses on the development of skills to manage information and to debate, leading and being part of a group, and conflict resolution. Likewise, the curriculum focuses on developing attitudes supportive of democratic values such as a sense of personal responsibility, acceptance of diversity and of different points of view, social integration of students of different economic classes, peaceful democratic coexistence, and the appreciation of freedom, justice and truth (Ministerio de Educacion de Chile 2004).

In summary, the current curriculum in Chile reflects three changes of emphasis: First, there has been a shift from Civic Education towards Citizenship Education, from knowledge about the state and political institutions, towards knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for democratic citizenship such as thinking skills, communication skills, understanding and working in the community, and values such as pluralism, solidarity, respect, and human rights. There is more emphasis on recent historical events, transition to democracy, and environmental issues.

Second, the study of civic education as a subject in a single grade has been replaced with the integration of these contents across history and social sciences in several grades. There has also been an emphasis on the development of complementary democratic skills and attitudes in the subjects of Language, Guidance and Philosophy.

Third, basic educational objectives that cut across all subjects as well as in practical activities related to school governance and climate (such as school and class councils and student debates) have been given attention.

## **Mexico**

Until 1993, civic education in Mexico focused on fostering national unity. A curriculum reform in 1993 introduced values education. Until 1999 civic education in Mexico was a subject in grades 7 to 9 and emphasized the study of legal and government institutions in Mexico with relatively limited coverage of democracy.

With the 1999 reform the subject Civic and Ethic Education (“Formación Cívica y Ética”) was incorporated into both primary and secondary curricula with the purpose of developing student democratic competencies and skills. This new subject was designed in collaboration with the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), an autonomous institution tasked with instituting processes that would support free elections in Mexico –and widely credited with the first presidential transition from the party that ruled Mexico for 70 years to an opposition party. IFE developed and implemented several programs of citizenship education. In partnership with the Center for Civic Education in the US, they prepared programs and a series of self-instructional materials for teachers suggesting activities that could be used to foster democratic skills. In cooperation with the Ministry of Education, they supported a program in which students participated in elections regarding issues affecting the life of the schools.

The new subject of Civic and Ethics Education focused on strengthening students’ thinking skills, setting the foundation for free and responsible actions for their individual development and to benefit society. The program seeks to develop eight competencies (SEP, 2005). The first is personal knowledge. The second is the exercise of responsible freedom balancing individual and collective interests. The third competency is respect for diversity, encompassing equity, empathy and solidarity. The fourth is a sense of belonging to a community, nation, and humanity.

This competency includes motivation to participate in community enhancement. The fifth competency is conflict management and the ability to formulate solutions that favour dialogue. The sixth competency is the ability to participate in social and political matters. The seventh competency refers to a sense of justice and respect for legality. This means understanding that no one is above the law, and laws are a product of community agreements. Finally, the eighth competency is comprehension and appreciation for democracy as a form of government and a way of relating on a daily basis.

Guiding the development of these competencies are several principles for classroom work. The learning environment should encourage dialogue that allows analysis, decision-making, and compromise. It is important to provide multiple sources of information for critical analysis. The teacher is to make the classroom and school into spaces for democratic learning, establishing opportunities for open communication and respect. Teachers design activities to present students' daily conflicts as problems to analyze, and solve. Civics and ethics are part of a particular subject, run transversally across the curriculum, and are addressed in the school environment through project-based learning.

The program highlights formative assessment that informs teachers about students' learning. Evaluation goes beyond a written test that determines a grade and is used to acquire information about student development in order to build appropriate student activities (Secretaria de Educacion Publica 2005).

In summary, changes in Chile, Colombia and Mexico evidence growing interest in citizenship education. Chile expanded the definition of civic education to develop a more encompassing curriculum establishing specific civic objectives for a range of subjects across the curriculum and reestablishing centers of student government. Colombia decided to supplement a formal curriculum of civic education with special programs to address pressing issues, and combined a top down strategy to disseminate promising programs with a bottom up strategy to identify best practices developed by teachers. Mexico expanded a curriculum focused on a very narrow definition of civic knowledge to one more inclusive of democratic values and skills. In all countries there is a shift to a broader view of democratic citizenship and a greater interest in skills as well as in knowledge, with a consequent emphasis in pedagogical opportunities to develop these skills.

### **Regional developments**

A number of activities focused on citizenship education with support from governments and development agencies in the region suggest that the topic has come of age as a legitimate and important topic for policy attention. This contrasts with the situation a few decades ago, when education policy was principally focused on getting children to school or teaching them the basics. That these basics now include citizenship competencies indicates that times have changed. This is both because Latin America is more democratic than it was twenty five years ago, and also because there is more contention about what democracy means and more concern about the future of democracy in the region. That education systems are reflecting these larger conversations indicates that the institutions of education are also becoming more attuned to larger social goals and expectations.

In the early 1990's the United States Agency for International Development stimulated discussion of the relationship between education and democracy, including a study of civic education in the primary school curriculum of all countries in Latin America and a study of several educational innovations to improve the

quality of education in high poverty schools. These studies and a review of existing empirical evidence found that civic education was largely an isolated subject in the curriculum, that it focused principally on factual knowledge about the political institutions of government and that school culture and teacher practice reflected authoritarian cultural values rather than democratic ideals (Villegas-Reimers 1993, 1994a and 1994b, Reimers 1994).

In 1999 the Inter-American Development Bank commissioned a review of research on civic education in Latin America, which was published by their education unit (Tibbitts and Torney-Purta 1999). This report included recommendations for program officers in the region about promoting education for democracy.

Recent activities at the regional level have contributed to placing the study and practice of citizenship education more centrally on the education reform agenda. From 2002 (soon after the release of the IEA international findings) until 2004 the Organization of American States (UDSE) supported and published a reanalysis of the IEA data from the three participating countries in the region (Chile, Colombia, and the U.S.) and Portugal. A detailed examination of this smaller group of countries and of students' responses at the item level to all the cognitive test items and many of the attitudinal items was especially informative (Torney-Purta and Amadeo, 2004). A number of issues that provide challenges for a program of civic education in the region were identified: young people who lack basic literacy, teachers' preparation, societal violence, relations between the Ministry of Education and non-governmental organizations, and political traditions such as populism. These authors suggested that a Latin American study of civic education be planned to examine student outcomes, aspects of the school, policies and current programs (Torney-Purta and Amadeo, 2004, p. 142).

In 2004 one of a multi-year series of meetings of Deputy Ministers of Education commissioned a survey of the curriculum of secondary schools to serve as input for further discussion (Reimers and Villegas-Reimers 2004). This paper was presented in early 2005 to the vice-ministers of education, who decided to commission a strategy paper that would make the case for explicit attention to citizenship education and outline policy options. That paper, published by the Inter-American Development Bank (Cox, Jaramillo and Reimers 2005) together with the OAS report (Torney-Purta and Amadeo, 2004) served as the basis of discussion at a regional meeting of Ministers of Education in August 2005. Several Ministers decided to collaborate in setting up an observatory of citizenship education, which would coordinate a regional study. This eventually became a regional module of the ICCS civic education study being organized by IEA and received financial support from the Inter-American Development Bank. As a result six countries from Latin America (Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, and Paraguay) are currently participating in the ICCS Civic Education Study. A network of scholars have agreed on a framework for the dimensions of democratic citizenship most relevant to the region and developed a regional module to assess both the knowledge, skills and attitudes of 15 year olds and the opportunities to learn these competencies in school. After pilot testing, these instruments will be administered concurrently with the international data collection instrument of the IEA ICCS civic education study in 2009 (in parallel with a European Regional Module). It is expected that this project will further stimulate quality programming in the participating countries and visibility for civic education in the region.

Concurrent with this activity, the Education Unit of the Organization of American States launched the Inter-American Program for Democratic Values and

Practices in 2006. This is a three pronged initiative to support democratic citizenship education through research, professional development and exchange of information and dissemination of best practices. The program builds on ongoing initiatives and examines both formal and non-formal education. Twenty-three countries from the Americas (Central, South and North) as well as the Caribbean responded to a survey designed to provide a description of policies related to education for democracy in the region. Respondents (most from Ministries of Education) indicated whether there was a national policy on the teaching of education for democratic citizenship, the extent to which the policies established national standards for students of different grades, as well as whether the policies promote a particular pedagogical approach.

### **Persisting challenges**

The recent changes in the curriculum reflect an emerging awareness in Latin America regarding the importance of the daily experience of students in the school in developing citizenship skills. However, there is little evidence that teacher practice and school culture are aligned with this goal. Even in contexts where the curriculum now explicitly focuses on developing democratic citizenship skills and knowledge, the daily experiences of students in schools frequently are of a different character. Teachers mediate the impact of changed curricula in their instructional practice. What teachers do is a function of their knowledge, beliefs, and competencies, as well as the incentives they face and the institutional culture and norms in which they work. For example, curricula emphasizing gender equity are meaningless in contexts where gender discrimination to staff or students is the rule. Schools where corruption takes place (including frequent unjustified teacher absenteeism, union intervention to prevent sanction of unprofessional performance, or charging illegal fees to enrol students) teach students forms of interaction inconsistent with democracy as a way of life. As a result, citizenship education is often disassociated from actual experience. The school's organization and the values that teaching staff hold and express contribute greatly to a school's hidden or unofficial curriculum (Reimers and Villegas-Reimers 2006). Part of the challenge is that teachers themselves live in a context where a significant number of adults hold views that are lukewarm about democratic institutions and practices.

Further, recent surveys of teachers in several countries of the region reveal that many of them hold attitudes that are not accepting of diversity. Homosexuals are the most common targets of discriminatory attitudes. Some teachers also discriminate on the basis of nationality, ethnic origin, or social condition: 11 percent of teachers in Uruguay, 15 percent in Argentina, and 38 percent in Peru discriminate against people based on their nationality or ethnic group. Discrimination against people who live in urban slums is shown among 16 percent of the teachers in Peru, 33 percent in Uruguay, and 52 percent in Argentina (Tenti-Fanfani 2003, p. 4).

A survey administered in 2002 to a representative sample of teachers in Mexico found that only a minority endorsed the obligation of a citizen to obey the law (29 percent) or respect the rights of others (18 percent). A striking 80 percent believed that justice administration and law enforcement agencies are corrupt and that they would not receive fair treatment were they to be arrested for a crime they did not commit. Nearly 30 percent of Mexican teachers indicated little satisfaction with democracy. Just half stated that voting is a way to influence government action; even fewer endorsed other ways to influence government. About twenty percent of the teachers would not accept an indigenous person or a person of another race

living in their home. Sixty percent of teachers acknowledge that teaching positions are illegally 'sold'. Eleven percent admit that parents are frequently asked to make illegal financial contributions to the school (Fundacion en Este Pais 2005).

This evidence suggests that Latin America education lives in two worlds apart: the world of policy governed by the idealized statements of the curriculum and the world of teaching practice and school culture. It appears that the results of the IEA Civic Education Study (CIVED) had more impact in the first of these worlds than in the second. One might hypothesize that policy and practice are always, to some extent, worlds apart (Tyack and Cuban 1995). In Latin America they appear especially far apart, in particular with respect to instruction that might empower the poor (Reimers 2006).

I hypothesize that three features of the way in which the CIVED study was conducted and organized in the 1990's contributed to its greater impact on policy than on pedagogy or practice. The first feature is that the organization of the study primarily involved policy elites; the second is that building long-term institutional capacity was a by-product rather than an explicit goal; the third is that the study was not designed to evaluate alternative approaches to citizenship education and their effects.

IEA is an international organization whose General Assembly is largely composed of individuals nominated by ministries of education. Most research teams conducting IEA studies are composed of individuals chosen in consultation with General Assembly members. These individuals are more likely to have ties to policy advisors, policy makers or national research organizations than to be representatives of educational institutions. There are many advantages to this process from the point of view of influencing policy. But in Latin America the hierarchical nature of much education policy-making often results in significant institutional discontinuities between central decision makers and implementing agencies, such as teachers, teacher education institutions, universities or teacher organizations. Even in countries where materials about the IEA studies' results are designed for and disseminated to teachers, it is often difficult to influence the content of teacher education programs or the agenda of teacher professional organizations. In Latin America top down governance represents a major institutional challenge with regard to all types of education policy and in particular limits the opportunity for research to have an impact on implementation (Reimers and McGinn 1997 and Reimers 2003).

The top down nature of education policy making also limits the opportunities for teachers to develop their sense of agency. It is optimistic to expect that teachers working in these kinds of organizations will be prepared to foster efficacy and a democratic spirit in their students. Many teachers either ignore the results of comparative studies or feel they are unfairly blamed for poor student scores. Often the programs implemented to address low achievement consist of lectures without opportunities for teachers to reflect about their practice, develop new instructional repertoires or receive coaching at their workplaces. In Mexico, for example, most teacher education in civics, as in other subjects, takes place through distance education. Teachers who want to improve their knowledge of the subject sign up to receive printed materials which they study on their own, followed by a written test.

Congruent with its focus on policy elites, the CIVED study supported the creation of a professional network. It was largely a network of individuals, not of institutions, however. As a result, institutional capacity to support citizenship education in Latin America, both in terms of generating innovative programs and in terms of evaluating their effectiveness, remains limited. The repository of

evidenced-based knowledge to support effective programming in this field is thin. This challenge is not unique to the citizenship education domain, but is particularly relevant here because the knowledge base is less developed than in other areas of instruction. This paucity of research accounts simultaneously for the importance of undertakings such as the IEA Civic Education Studies (including the specific reports based on Chile and Colombia) and also for the underutilization of these results. If stronger institutional research capacity had existed to generate more secondary analysis of the data set addressing targeted-policy related and practice-related questions, the impact of the study's results might have been enhanced.

Finally, because the study was not designed to assess the 'value added' by specific programs of civic education, its impact has been limited in stimulating specific interventions at the classroom level. This may reflect the stage of development of knowledge and efforts in this field in the region. Perhaps as the topic of citizenship education becomes established as legitimate and as more high quality programs are developed in this field, the evaluation of these natural experiments will be a logical next step. This was certainly not a possibility when the CIVED study was planned in the late 1990s, though some secondary analysis undertaken using data from a small numbers of countries (including Chile) has taken a step in this direction (Torney-Purta, Amadeo, and Richardson, 2007).

The reports produced from the IEA CIVED study include analysis of descriptive information as well as multiple regression analyses that test hypotheses about the relative contribution of various instructional conditions to students' civic competencies. In Latin America, the policy impact of the descriptive information, in some cases as basic as showing the percentage of students who answered particular items correctly on the test in each country relative to the students in the rest of the countries participating in the study, has been given more weight than the analyses that compute the effect sizes associated with various instructional conditions.

There are also some missed opportunities especially important for countries where educational access and basic literacy are endemic problems. There is indirect evidence in the study that reading resources at home are associated with civic knowledge and other aspects of competency. This evidence has largely been interpreted as demonstrating the role of cultural capital in developing civic competency, rather than as a plausible link between literacy skills or reading practice and civic skills. The evidence available from the study could not have established a definitive link, but it suggests further analysis of the existing data around this question as well as consideration of this link between literacy and citizenship in further research.

## Conclusions

In the Latin American context, where political developments have caused government officials, educators and citizens alike to think deeply about the meaning of democracy, the IEA Civic Education Study represented a significant contribution to regional conversations among education specialists about the importance of citizenship education and the strategies to provide it. There are very clear and direct forms of impact of this study in Colombia and Chile, the two countries which participated in the study. In both national standards and curriculum were influenced by the study's broad definition of citizenship competency, and in Colombia the study supported further interest in evaluation of student knowledge and skills. There are also indirect forms of impact at a regional level and in countries which did not participate in the study, most notably Mexico. It is noteworthy that the knowledge

which appears to have had most impact in policy and curriculum is descriptive comparative data about knowledge.

The fact that this study has been so useful and influential in framing the conversation about citizenship education in Latin America is a reminder that the relevance of a study may trump methodological orthodoxy when it comes to influencing policy. Descriptive information can be very valuable to understand a problem and to set the stage for further forms of inquiry, which may include program evaluation or experimentation. This reminder is useful at this time, when fascination with experimental research in the international development policy community may risk neglecting topics where the state of conceptual development is not ready for sensible experimentation.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of the study has been to support the development of networks of specialists in citizenship education and to stimulate the interest of the greater number of countries who will be participating in the International Civics and Citizenship IEA study (ICCS) in 2009, including a set of regional questions.

There are many outstanding challenges regarding citizenship education in the region and some of them represent missed opportunities for impact from the IEA CIVED study. Because the study involved professionals in elite policy networks, in contexts where education governance is hierarchical and top down, it failed to engage teacher professional organizations, teacher training institutions, universities, non-government organizations and other grass root organizations which might have more directly worked at the intersection between policy and practice and in teachers' professional development.

A second outstanding challenge concerns the more precise identification of the effects of alternative forms of programming. The CIVED study was not designed to assess the contributions of 'opportunities to learn' civic education as intended in the curriculum of instruction in any of the countries included in the study. As a result the study generated valuable knowledge about general factors associated with various dimensions of civic knowledge and skills, but not specific knowledge about the results achieved by programs of instruction favoured in different countries.

Finally, the development of institutional capacity to conduct educational research and evaluation in this and other areas remains crucial if the region is to generate the knowledge necessary to boost the low levels of educational quality. While this cannot become the sole responsibility of comparative research efforts, it would be fruitful to design participation in those efforts to contribute to the development of institutional research and evaluation capacity in institutions beyond Ministries of Education.

Democracy is alive and in flux, if not clearly well, in Latin America. This flux constitutes one of the most consequential current political and social transformations in the region. By placing an interest in citizenship education more centrally among the purposes of instruction it appears that school systems have demonstrated an ability to shape fundamental changes in the social context of schools. There is no better time or place to study the contribution of education to democratic citizenship. The IEA Civic Education Study raised that challenge in Latin America during the last decade. In all likelihood the years ahead will be even more promising and challenging for scholars and practitioners working to develop democratic competencies and also for the future of democracy at large in the region.

*Correspondence:* FERNANDO REIMERS, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Gutman 461, Appian Way, Cambridge, MA 02138.  
Email: Fernando\_Reimers@harvard.edu

## NOTES

- [1] I appreciate the feedback of Cristian Cox, Rosario Jaramillo and George Landau to a draft of this paper. The responsibility for the ideas contained in this paper is my own.  
[2] Cristian Cox. Personal Communication. September 3, 2007.

## References:

- AMADEO, J., TORNEY-PURTA, J.; LEHMANN, R.; HUSFELDT, V.; & NIKOLOVA, R. (2002). Civic knowledge and engagement among upper secondary students in sixteen countries. Amsterdam: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. <http://www.wam.umd.edu/~iea>.
- FUNDACIÓN EN ESTE PAIS (2005) Lo que piensan nuestros maestros Encuesta Nacional sobre Creencias, Actitudes y Valores de maestros y padres de familia de la Educación Básica en México. Este País, 169, 4-16.
- COX, C. (2003). Citizenship education in curriculum reforms of the 1990s in Latin America. In F. AUDIGER AND N. BOTTANI (Eds.), *Education et vivre ensemble*. Paris: IBE/UNESCO
- COX, C., JARAMILLO, R., & REIMERS, F. (2005). *Education for Democratic Citizenship in the Americas*. Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Development Bank.
- GUEVARA, G. & TIRADO, F. (2006) Conocimientos Cívicos en Mexico: Un estudio comparativo internacional. *Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa*. 11(30).
- LATINOBAROMETRO. Opinión Pública Latinoamericana. Corporación Latinobarómetro [latinobarometro@latinobarometro.org](mailto:latinobarometro@latinobarometro.org)  
Orrego Luco 130, Providencia Santiago - Chile [www.latinobarometro.org](http://www.latinobarometro.org)
- MINISTERIO DE EDUCACIÓN. Chile. (2004). *Formación Ciudadana en el Currículo de la Reforma*.
- PAYNE, M. et al. (2007) *Democracies in Development*. Washington, DC.
- INTERAMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK. Boston, MA: David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard University.
- REIMERS, F. AND MCGINN, N. (1997) *Informed dialogue. changing education policies around the world*. Praeger Publishers. (Published in Spanish as *Dialogo informado* by Centro de Estudios Educativos in Mexico. 2000).
- REIMERS, F. (2003) The social context of educational evaluation in Latin America. In T. KELLAGHAN AND D. STUFFLEBEAM (eds). *International Handbook of Educational Evaluation*. pp. 441-463. Kluwer Academic Press.
- REIMERS, F AND VILLEGAS-REIMERS, E. (2005) *Educación para la Ciudadanía y la Democracia: Políticas y programas en Escuelas Secundarias de América Latina y el Caribe (Education for Democratic Citizenship in high schools in Latin America and the Caribbean)*. Washington, DC. InterAmerican Development Bank. *Dialogo Regional en Educación*. (Central Paper of Discussion for a Seminar of Undersecretaries of Education of the region organized by the Interamerican Development Bank. Washington, DC. February 2005).
- REIMERS, F. (2006) Citizenship, identity and education. examining the public purposes of schools in an age of globalization. *Prospects*. 36, 3.
- REIMERS, F. (1991) The impact of economic stabilization and adjustment on education in Latin America. *Comparative Education Review*. 35 2, 319-353.
- REIMERS, F. AND VILLEGAS-REIMERS, E. (2006) Educating democratic citizens in Latin America. In Kagan, J. and Harrington, L. (eds). *Essays in Cultural Change*. pp. 95-114. Routledge.
- REIMERS, F. (2006) Social progress in Latin America. In V. Bulmer-Thomas and J. Coatsworth (eds). *Cambridge Economic History of Latin America*. Vol II. pp. 427-480. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- SECRETARÍA DE EDUCACIÓN PÚBLICA. (2005) *Educación Secundaria, Formación Cívica y Ética, Programas de Estudio*. México.
- SECRETARÍA DE EDUCACIÓN PÚBLICA. (2006) *Formación Cívica y Ética*



- Secretaría de Educación Pública. México.
- TENTI FANFANI, EMILIO. (2003) *Les Immigres à l'école. La Xénophobie des Enseignants en Argentine, Perou et Uruguay*. Buenos Aires. Instituto Internacional de Planificación de la Educación. [http://www.iipe-buenosaires.org.ar/pdfs/docentes-immigrantes\\_frances.pdf](http://www.iipe-buenosaires.org.ar/pdfs/docentes-immigrantes_frances.pdf)
- TIBBITTS, F. AND TORNEY-PURTA, J. (1999) *Citizenship education in Latin America*. Washington, D.C.: InterAmerican Development Bank.
- TORNEY-PURTA, J. (2005) *Beyond rhetoric to empirical evidence: Fourteen-year olds' understanding of threats to democracy, economic principles, and political institutions in the Americas*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society, Stanford, California.
- TORNEY-PURTA, J. AND AMADEO, J. (2004) *Strengthening democracy in Latin America: An empirical analysis of the views of students and teachers*. [Fortalecimiento de la democracia en las Americas a través de la educación cívica: Un análisis empírico que destaca las opiniones de los estudiantes y los maestros.] Washington, DC. Organization of American States.
- TORNEY-PURTA, J., AMADEO, J. AND RICHARDSON, W. (2007) *Civic service among youth in Chile, Denmark, England and the United States: A psychological perspective*. In A. MCBRIDE & M. SHERRADEN (eds). *Civic Service Worldwide: Impacts and inquiries*. pp. 95-132. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe.
- TORNEY-PURTA, J., LEHMANN, R., OSWALD, H., SCHULZ, W. (2001) *Citizenship and Education in Twenty-eight Countries: Civic Knowledge and Engagement at Age Fourteen*. Amsterdam: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). <http://www.wam.umd.edu/~iea>.
- TYACK, D. AND CUBAN, L. (1995) *Tinkering Toward Utopia. A Century of Public School Reform in the United States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- UNITED NATIONS. ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN. (1992) *Education and Knowledge. Basic Pillars of Productive Transformation with Equity*. Santiago: United Nations. <http://www.eclac.cl/cgi-bin/getProd.asp?xml=/publicaciones/xml/4/4374/P4374.xml&xsl=/tpl-i/p9f.xsl>
- UNDP. (2004) *Democracy in Latin America. Towards a Citizens Democracy*. [http://democracyreport.undp.org/Downloads/Report\\_Democracy\\_in\\_Latin\\_America\\_New.zip](http://democracyreport.undp.org/Downloads/Report_Democracy_in_Latin_America_New.zip)
- UNESCO. Oficina Regional para América Latina y el Caribe. Laboratorio Latinoamericano de Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación. <http://llece.unesco.cl/esp/>