

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Paths to 21st Century Competencies Through Civic Education Classrooms

AN ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS FROM NINTH-GRADERS

JUDITH TORNEY-PURTA AND BRITT S. WILKENFELD

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

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THE REPORT IN BRIEF

Civic education, especially when it is interactive and involves discussion of current issues, is an important way to develop the skills that young Americans need to succeed in the 21st Century workforce. Students who experience interactive discussion-based civic education (either by itself or in combination with lecture-based civic education) score the

INTRODUCTION

Interest is high on the part of business leaders, as well as the general public, in the competencies that young people will need to thrive in an economy that is rapidly changing, global in scope, and technology driven. Educators are urged to ensure that young people acquire 21st Century skills and competencies by the time they leave school.

Lists of these competencies have been formulated with a high level of consensus across groups. In addition to basic skills in reading and mathematics, they include, for example:

- ★ basic knowledge of economic and political processes;
- ★ skill in understanding what is presented in the media;
- ★ the ability to work well with others, especially diverse groups;
- ★ positive attitudes about working hard and obeying the law;
- ★ creativity and innovation.

Educators are beginning to mobilize in support of these competencies viewed in an integrated way. However, a worrisome gap exists in research providing an evidence base about the ways students gain these competencies. Considerable strides are being made in designing assessments of these competencies using 21st Century ICT methods, but versions suitable for widespread use are several years in the future. The analysis of existing data collected from students in large scale assessments can both provide a timely set of findings and suggest content that should be included in future assessment efforts.

The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools (CMS), a consortium of 50 organizations organized in 2004 to implement and evaluate promising practices in this area, is in a unique position to spearhead program development for 21st Century competencies. In 2008 this organization accepted the challenge to identify existing research data in this area and support its timely analysis.

highest on “21st Century Competencies,” including working with others (especially in diverse groups) and knowledge of economic and political processes. Students who experience neither interactive nor lecture-based civic education have the lowest scores on all of the 21st Century competencies examined. This group, which comprises about one-quarter of all American students, shows not only low levels of knowledge but also a relatively low level of willingness to obey the law.

THE EVIDENCE ON WHICH THIS REPORT IS BASED

CMS chose to utilize data from the IEA Civic Education Study (CIVED), which had been collected from a nationally representative sample of 14-year-olds in 1999 in the United States (the cohort that is 24 years of age in 2009). This analysis provides the starting point of an evidence base for 21st Century competencies.

The IEA CIVED data set includes rigorously designed measures of 21st Century competencies involving knowledge, behavior, and attitudes. The competencies are media literacy, economic knowledge, experiences with cooperative groups and individuals with diverse views, learning about other countries, support for minorities’ rights, a habit of reading the news media, a sense of one’s ability to effectively take part in discussions, and the willingness to work hard and to obey the law. The data set also includes a measure of students’ intention to complete only high school or to drop out before graduation.

Using the IEA CIVED data set enabled researchers to compare four groups based on the type of civic education experienced (see Figure 1): a group that has experienced only lecture-based civic education, a group that has experienced only interactive discussion-based civic education, a group that has experienced both lecture-based and interactive discussion-based civic education, and a group that has experienced neither lecture-based nor interactive discussion-based civic education.

Figure 1. Educational groups based on the type of civic education experienced

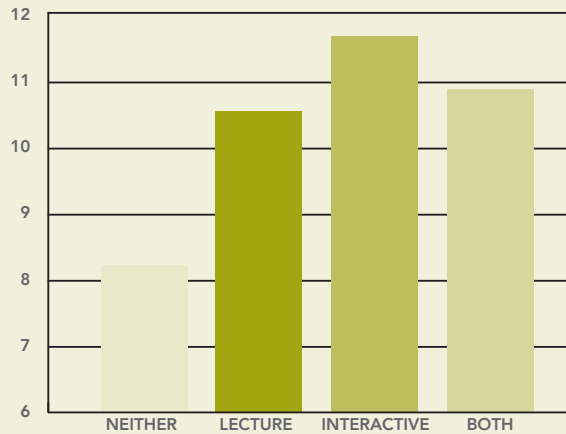
		Open Class Climate Scale	
		LOW	HIGH
Traditional Teaching Scale	LOW	Neither	Interactive
	HIGH	Lecture	Both

RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

The students who experienced interactive discussion-based civic education (either by itself or in combination with lecture-based education) had the highest scores on all the 21st Century competencies when the four groups were compared. Examples are found in Figures 2 and 3.

The students who experienced neither type of civic education had the lowest scores on all the 21st Century competencies. This group showed not only low levels of knowledge but also a relatively low level of willingness to obey the law (shown in Figure 4 on the following page) and lower educational aspirations.

Figure 2. Level of economic knowledge by educational group^a



^a Economic knowledge is a 12-item IRT scale measuring knowledge of implicit and explicit economic content, such as an understanding of labor unions and the free market.

Note: Details concerning the statistical significance of group differences are in the full report.

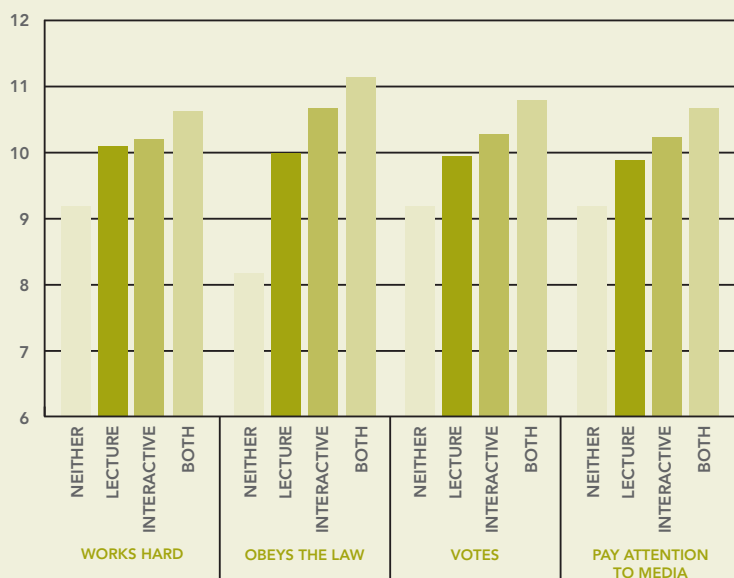
Figure 3. Level of school experience with diversity, cooperation, and learning about other countries, by educational group^a



^a School experience is measured with single items about whether students have learned in school to understand people who have different ideas, to cooperate in groups with other students, and to be concerned about what happens in other countries.

Note: Details concerning the statistical significance of group differences are in the full report.

Figure 4. Norms of social responsibility by educational group^a



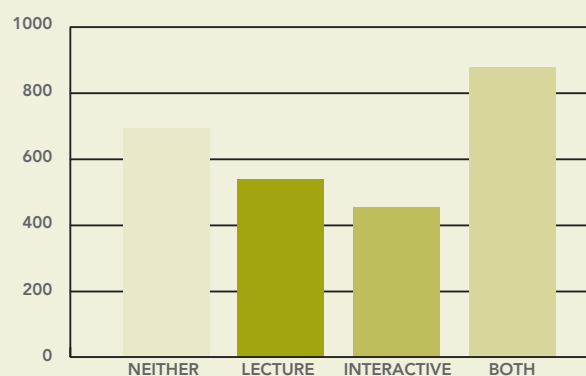
^aNorms of social responsibility are assessed with single items measuring the extent of students' agreement that a good adult citizen should work hard, obey the law, vote, and pay attention to issues in the media.

Note: Details concerning the statistical significance of group differences are in the full report.

The full report contains comparisons between these four educational groups, showing similar results on media literacy, efficacy in discussion participation, expected educational attainment, and attitudes toward minorities. The students who experienced only lecture-based civic education were sometimes equal but never superior to the interactive discussion-based education group in achievement of 21st Century competencies when the groups were compared.

The largest proportion of students reported experiencing a combination of lecture-based and interactive discussion-based civic education. However, more than one quarter experienced neither type of civic education and are likely to be disadvantaged in their futures as workers as well as citizens.

Figure 5. Number of students in the four civic education groups



CONCLUDING REMARKS

This analysis provides evidence that can serve to enlist individuals and organizations promoting civic education in the task of fostering adolescents' 21st Century skills and competencies. Educators who wish to strengthen their programs should focus on enhancing interactive

discussion-based teaching methods with a strong content focus as part of every student's educational experience. This will benefit both the individual's preparation as a citizen grounded in knowledge of democratic principles and also the individual's preparation as a worker who understands economic processes and can collaborate with a diverse range of co-workers.