CHAPTER 17:

# Joining an International Community of Practice: Reflections on the IEA Civic Education Studies

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**Abstract** This chapter presents reflections from an educational researcher who began her involvement with the project as an early career scholar soon after the release of the first IEA Civic Education Study (CIVED) report nearly two decades ago. She describes the secondary analysis of these data that took place, especially in the ensuring decade, along with ways in which involvement with the IEA civic education studies shaped her own professional development and that of others. She describes joining the large and small communities of researchers (going back to the first IEA International Research Conference) and reflects on how the IEA civic education studies have shaped approaches to studying educational processes and the development of social attitudes in students. In particular, the nature of these data and emerging statistical methodologies allowed the exploration of the role of contextual factors in civic development. Second, cross-disciplinary collaborations with international specialists in the social and behavioral sciences (as well as educational researchers) provided perspectives that broadened the educational or developmental psychology approaches common in the United States. The benefits and challenges of work with large-scale data and with interdisciplinary and cross-national collaboration are highlighted. Links to the datasets and to lists of publications are described.

## Introduction

The first International Research Conference (IRC) of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) in Nicosia, Cyprus was an introduction for many to the opportunities for secondary analysis of data from the 1999 IEA Civic Education Study (CIVED) and to the international communities of researchers undertaking this work. In the year leading up to this conference, I had been a doctoral research assistant at the University of Maryland, analyzing CIVED data on topics such as educational inequality, adolescents' sense of political trust, and democratic school participation. However, IEA IRC attendees represented a broader international community of researchers with a common interest in IEA's international studies across subject areas, including international leaders of the studies alongside researchers with both substantive and methodological expertise in working with the studies.

This was an intentional feature not only of the IEA and CIVED research community, but of the CIVED study itself, as illustrated in the conceptual framework created several years earlier to guide the study. Specifically, Torney-Purta et al. (2001) cited "communities of practice," a concept used by Lave (1991) to describe how individuals learn through shared interactions with members of a community with common goals. Individuals begin observing or taking on an apprentice role, and gradually move to more central roles in the group. This sociocultural perspective on learning, which was key to the CIVED steering committee's conceptualization of 14-year-olds' civic learning, has also been applied to doctoral and post-graduate education (Carretero et al. 2016; Shacham and Od-Cohen 2009). As a researcher beginning doctoral study just as the CIVED study data were being made available for secondary analysis, my communities of practice, like those of many early career scholars who have published based on these studies (e.g., Isac, this volume; Pizmony-Levy and Torney-Purta 2018; Sandoval Hernandez et al., this volume) were shaped by the scholarly approaches and values of the researchers working on this study.

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## Background: Early Career Development and Introduction to IEA

Working with large-scale datasets had been part of my studies in sociology at Johns Hopkins University, where I analyzed data from the universe of public secondary schools in the United States (rather than samples of students). However, interest in the interplay between the contexts of schools and the lives of the students who attended them led me to pursue graduate study in human development at the University of Maryland (College Park), specializing in educational psychology. There, I joined the CIVED research team led by Judith Torney-Purta and Jo-Ann Amadeo, who had been with this project from its inception nearly 10 years earlier. The CIVED project's book of national case studies (Torney-Purta et al. 1999) and report on international comparisons of 14-year-olds in CIVED (Torney-Purta et al. 2001) were already available. The upper-secondary report had recently been published (Amadeo et al. 2002), and a few special issues of journals relating to the studies were being developed. Most project leaders at the international coordinating center at Humboldt University of Berlin were returning to other responsibilities. At the University of Maryland, a plan was underway to develop an infrastructure to encourage researchers to use these cross-national civics data in further analyses, and to present the results of in-depth secondary analysis to a wide range of international audiences interested in youth development generally and more specifically in civic education.

It was clear that developing the full potential of these data would require resources for secondary analysis, and a proposal to the W. T. Grant Foundation to support this work had been funded. Independently, William Galston and Peter Levine had recently established the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), in the School of Public Affairs at the University of Maryland (and later moved it to Tufts University in Massachusetts, where it remains influential). CIRCLE's leadership was interested in disseminating brief reports of empirical studies to scholarly, practitioner, and policymaker audiences interested in youth civic engagement. This provided a way to disseminate short user-friendly presentations of findings from CIVED secondary analyses on topics such as media usage (Amadeo et al. 2004) or patterns of civic knowledge (Torney-Purta and Barber 2004).

The team from the University of Maryland also obtained funding from CIRCLE to establish the Civic Education Data and Researcher Services Center (CEDARS), whose goal was to encourage the use of data from the IEA civics studies by providing technical support, short reports for interested researchers, and enhanced datasets including scores on scales not included in the international data files. A collaborator in this work on the expanded datasets was Vera Husfeldt, who visited Maryland in 2005 after her decade of work in the international coordinating center for CIVED at Humboldt University (Husfeldt et al. 2005). This report, available on the University of Maryland website, details eight additional attitudinal scales derived from the IEA CIVED data, including attitudes toward ethnic minority groups and protective attitudes toward one's nation to supplement the 12 scales available on the IEA data sets.[1]

During doctoral studies I co-authored a number of articles, technical reports, and research briefs communicating CIVED research results to policymakers and educators while also working as a consultant on statistical issues and on substantive issues pertaining to classroom and school climate. In 2007, I accepted a faculty position at an urban research university in the Midwestern United States, with the expectation of sustaining a coherent line of scholarship. Analysis of the civics studies (first CIVED, then later the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education

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1   For a considerable period of time the datasets were available only through the IEA organization's website. However, recently they were archived by the CivicLEADS Project, which manages a collection of datasets in this area at the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research (Regents of the University of Michigan 2020). About one third of the researchers who download the IEA CIVED and ICCS datasets from CivicLEADS are from outside the United States. The CivicLEADS website also provides a list of publications reporting analyses of these data, which can serve as a resource to scholars interested in identifying understudied research issues and choosing a journal for the submission of an article.

Study [ICCS] of 2009) served as the core of this scholarly agenda. Taking a faculty position also meant expanding roles as a mentor. This resulted in a research team to encourage students' use of several large-scale datasets to answer questions of interest to counseling and educational psychologists (e.g., Barber and Ross 2018, 2020; Barber et al. 2015). The communities of practice idea served as a model when forming this team.

Arriving at the University of Maryland just as potential for secondary analyses of the CIVED data was being recognized created a unique experience for professional development. However, some aspects of this experience can be generalized to working with large-scale, cross-national survey data in a variety of settings. The remainder of this chapter highlights three specific examples of this. First is a discussion of how analyzing large-scale civics data supports substantive and methodological approaches to educational research and psychology. Second, is a description of the interdisciplinary community that began more than 10 years ago and continues to be important for conducting research with such data. Finally, there are comments about the value of international collaborations for this work more generally.

## Preparing Educational Psychologists to use Large-Scale Civics Data

Educational psychologists are interested in understanding how young people develop within learning environments, including consideration of both the contextual features of the environment and their interactions with individual characteristics. The use of representative data sets, particularly from multiple countries, allows the exploration of development in varied cultural and political contexts; this is seldom a strong feature of research in this area of psychology given its focus on smaller and non-representative samples. The IEA civics data sets provide large enough samples and a broad enough range of variables to analyze contextual variation in a meaningful way.

### Contextualized Approaches to the Study of Educational Psychology

Like other branches of the discipline, educational psychology has historically relied on studies from non-representative and local data sources (a fact that Duncan, 1991, documented and lamented in developmental psychology several decades ago). However, results from such studies have limited contextual variability and often fail to generalize meaningfully to broader groups. Enhanced external validity is a benefit of conducting secondary analyses on nationally-representative datasets. One key way in which work with the CIVED/ICCS studies can have an impact upon educational psychologists is by making them sensitive to issues of context and generalizability. Mueller and Hart (2008) noted that a benefit of large-scale surveys, above and beyond their generalizability, is the ability to understand which aspects of context are most relevant to psychological and educational processes and outcomes. It is usually the case that large and varied samples are required to ensure sufficient power and variability to look within and between groups of students in order to examine moderating effects of context and culture.

Professional socialization in the context of the IEA civics studies can provide interested scholars with the tools to consider such interactions between process and context. One approach, for example, is to conduct regression models in multiple countries in order to consider how similarities and differences in findings, as was done to illustrate varied developmental processes in the growth of trust across national contexts (Torney-Purta et al. 2004). A second approach, using more advanced statistical methodologies, is to examine country-level characteristics alongside and in interaction with individual predictors of youth outcomes (e.g., Barber et al. 2013; Sandoval-Hernandez et al. 2018; Torney-Purta et al. 2008). With large sample sizes it is also possible to conduct robust analyses comparing predictors of student outcomes by gender, ethnic identity, or immigrant status (Barber and Torney-Purta 2009; Barber et al. 2015; Torney-Purta et al. 2007). For example, within the broader community of psychologists, Diemer and Rapa (2016), and Godfrey and Grayman (2013) have used CIVED data from the United States to examine the experiences of members of minoritized racial groups using moderation or multi-group techniques.

Many benefits of working with large-scale databases for educational researchers apply regardless of content area; in other words, similar benefits would be gained from looking at large-scale studies of math, science, or literacy. However, there are some features of large-scale studies of civic education (and their secondary analyses) that are worth highlighting. For one, compared to large-scale studies in other subject areas, the CIVED/ICCS studies have paid particularly close attention to the development of strong measures for the assessment of social context and of processes (noted in the review of 100 articles of secondary analysis of these data by Knowles et al. 2018). Of particular importance are measures of classroom climate, opportunities for student voice in the school, and (beginning in the ICCS 2009 study) perceptions of student/teacher relationships. These variables have expanded the potential of these data sets for those interested in understanding educational contexts cross-nationally (e.g., Reichert et al. 2018) and secondary analyses incorporating these variables were featured prominently in an examination of learning environments as supports for civic reasoning and discourse sponsored by the United States-based National Academy of Education (Barber et al. 2021).

The focus on participatory intensions and on attitudes alongside civic knowledge as outcomes has expanded interest in studying how context may shape key aspects of development. An early product of the team at Maryland was a "28-country database" containing national indicators for countries participating in the CIVED study. While many of these variables can be studied in relation to knowledge (a classic outcome for educational psychologists regardless of subject area), indicators added to this data source have also been used to predict citizenship norms (including those pertaining to human rights), inclusive attitudes toward participation, and political self-efficacy (Barber et al. 2013; Barber and Torney-Purta 2009; Torney-Purta et al. 2008).

*Methodological Expertise for Large-Scale Data Analyses*

To ensure national representation, the CIVED and ICCS surveys employed a complex sampling design (clusters of students within a stratified random sample of schools), and it is vital to weight and account for design effects before making claims about a representative sample. In addition, there are data that can be taken into account from students, teachers, schools, and countries. As acknowledged in the previous section, training in statistical methodologies appropriate for nested data, such as multilevel modeling, allows researchers interested in working with CIVED and ICCS to take more complete advantage of these data. For example, an early secondary analysis by the team at Maryland used multilevel modeling techniques to link teachers' attitudes and training to students' outcomes in the subset of countries where direct linking of students to teachers could be supported (Torney-Purta et al. 2005). This remains one of the few attempts to link specific teachers with their classes.

To place the contributions of such work in perspective, it is important to note a conclusion in a handbook chapter describing the potential contribution of secondary data sources (such as CIVED and ICCS) to research in social studies education. Heafner et al. (2016) concluded that the lack of training to analyze data from complex surveys has been a barrier to many researchers who have substantive interests in research on social studies and civic engagement. While it is not necessary to receive a degree in statistics to work with large-scale data, developing methodological expertise is vital. While some challenges (such as appropriately utilizing sample weights) are characteristic of work with large-scale data across subject areas, working with civics datasets can be especially challenging due to the focus on attitudinal/behavioral data measured on rating scales rather than the right/wrong items found in assessments of knowledge. As outlined both in the technical reports for CIVED (Schulz and Sibberns 2004) and ICCS (Schulz et al. 2011), as well as several secondary data analyses (e.g., Husfeldt et al. 2005; Munck et al. 2018), polytomous items add another level of difficulty to the already complex measurement characteristic of large scale assessments.

In many cases, researchers working with CIVED/ICCS data expand their community of practice by networking with others interested in effectively using large-scale datasets, in order to remain aware of up-and-coming methodologies, analytic tools, and data sources. Special interest groups (SIGs) in the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Comparative International Education Society (CIES) have been instrumental in developing and sustaining this network, and researchers working with the civics data have served in leadership roles within these groups. Such SIGs promote and highlight work with large-scale data by sponsoring conference sessions, featuring datasets and their secondary analysis in newsletters and other publications, and presenting awards to particularly exemplary pieces of scholarship.

## Cross-disciplinary Collaborations

In these groups organized around methodology, membership is drawn from across disciplinary backgrounds. In fact, some of the most valuable discussion takes place when subject-area educators, educational policy scholars, and methodologists have the opportunity to communicate. This speaks to another feature of work on CIVED and ICCS: work with these datasets brings together researchers from multiple disciplines. Scholars such as Duncan (1991) and Friedman (2007) have long highlighted the potential for secondary analyses to support opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration among scientists. Such opportunities are particularly prominent in the CIVED and ICCS studies, as the measures they included have been drawn from a wide range of areas and have received widespread interest from a range of social and behavioral scientists: political scientists, educational researchers (especially those interested in social studies), psychologists, sociologists, comparative education researchers, social policy specialists, and political psychologists (a feature noted in the literature review from Knowles et al. 2018). Although disciplines differ in their approaches, there has nevertheless been a sense of membership in a common research community shared by those working with these data.

My own professional identity as an educational psychologist has been enriched by interdisciplinary collaborations working on the civic data with statisticians (Munck et al. 2018), political scientists (Maurissen et al. 2018, 2020), public policy researchers (Barber et al. 2013), and educational researchers from social studies (Knowles et al. 2018). For example, research on country-level moderators of attitudes toward immigration was facilitated by the opportunity to collaborate with a social policy researcher with expertise on immigration (Barber et al. 2013). Similarly, work with a statistician was crucial in introducing cutting-edge methodologies to the study of measurement invariance across cohorts using CIVED and ICCS data (Munck et al. 2018). As a historical note, the senior author of that article began as an early career scholar associated with the IEA studies during the 1970s at Stockholm University. The range of disciplines represented by the chapter authors in this volume provide further evidence of the interdisciplinary nature of the civic education studies.

Projects conducted both with CIVED/ICCS and other data sources and methodologies show that interdisciplinary research ultimately benefits from taking multiple approaches to a problem. Work with researchers in fields such as social studies education and social/educational policy has been important in considering the practical application of civic education research findings. In a recent interdisciplinary and international collaboration using ICCS data with political scientists, reviewing the work of educational psychologists provided new insight on social aspects of schooling (Maurissen et al. 2018). Such approaches can also come to define work conducted by researchers even when not using CIVED or ICCS data.

## International Collaborations

Researchers working with the data from the civics studies have come from multiple countries in addition to coming from multiple disciplines. It is important that members of this international community find opportunities to come together, to share themes from their work and identify avenues to collaborate jointly on future projects. IEA IRCs have a dedicated strand devoted to civic education, which tends to attract the same audience members for every session. CIVED (and later ICCS) strands at the first IEA IRC in Cyprus, and the subsequent seven conferences held across the world, have illustrated this point. Other national and international research conferences (e.g., American Political Science Association, Comparative and International Education Society and the International Society for Political Psychology), and internal seminars for policy groups and funders (e.g., the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission) have provided similar experiences. Even though opportunities for electronic communication have expanded, being at a conference in person gives researchers important opportunities to hear perspectives face-to-face, and to spend time together in discussions outside of formal meetings. While videoconferencing technologies have become increasingly valuable (even essential), the benefits of face-to-face time in collaboration should not be discounted.

International collaboration is also fostered by personal visits to universities. In 2011, I spent two weeks in Sweden, at Örebro University working with Erik Amnå, Håkan Stattin, and colleagues in their Youth and Society Centre. This included a workshop on cluster-analytic (person-centered) techniques in civic education research, drawing an audience from across the Nordic and Baltic region. Later, during a sabbatical in 2016, I spent three months as a visiting scholar with the Centre for Political Research at the University of Leuven, working with Ellen Claes and the ICCS 2016 team from Flanders and participating in departmental colloquia with them (as well as with Marc Hooghe and his research team). Such extended stays facilitated consultations with scholars at all levels that would not have been possible at a conference. They also allow one to witness how differences in cultural context and policy priorities shape the approaches to encouraging young people to develop as citizens (and the research questions to be pursued).

Such collaborations require both skills (e.g., in navigating cultural differences in work environments) and resources to provide opportunities to hone these skills. Senior researchers can provide support for travel and leverage their networks to identify arrange the necessary connections for collaboration—key resources for an early career researcher (Flanagan et al. 2015). Beyond individual supports and connections, the National Research Council's (2014) report on strengthening international research collaborations in the social sciences focused on multiple ways in which home institutions could support faculty's international collaborations (e.g., through travel grants to international conferences and support for research leaves). This aspect of collaboration extends back 50 years in the history of the IEA network, stemming back to when the six subject area survey was headquartered at Stockholm University. Funding from the Spencer Foundation supported early career post-doctoral fellows, including several from the United States as well as from Finland and Hungary, who worked closely with more senior scholars on several projects. Similarly, my own ability to participate in international research collaborations was supported both by senior scholars in the field (including but by no means limited to the editors of this book) and by financial support from both my university and external sources.

## Conclusion

Mentors and colleagues met through work with CIVED and ICCS have provided an enriching, interdisciplinary, and international community of practice for my research. Many other scholars of this generation and earlier generations have benefited in similar ways. This work, and the community in which it resides, provides not only a data source for empirical research, but also increasingly, opportunities to mentor up-and-coming researchers through conducting new

secondary analyses and synthesizing existing work (e.g., Knowles et al. 2018; Maurissen et al. 2018b). Once again true to sociocultural approaches to understanding learning, it has been the experiences in these groups tied to CIVED/ICCS that has given scholars of my generation specific skills to conduct research and to become productive members of professional communities contributing to educational discourse internationally in the field of civic education. This generation is already establishing its leadership and carrying on this tradition.

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