Civic education in the Netherlands
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SUMMARY.

The subject of this thesis is civic education in the Netherlands. Our discussion which is multi-faceted is based on data collected for an international survey conducted by the International Association for the Educational Achievement (the I.E.A.). First, we examine the place of educational systems within society. Our objective is to analyse the outcomes of the school system through measures of children's socio-political attitudes and perceptions, rather than the more conventionally used achievement scores. We expect that this relatively novel approach will demonstrate that the educational system "speaks in more than one voice", that rather than constituting an either/or system promoting different or integrative functions, it, in fact, promotes both. In other words, we suggest that the message of the educational system can be two-fold: differentiation in terms of achievement and solidarity in terms of socio-political attitudes.

Second, we locate the study within the methods and paradigms of research on political socialisation. This allows us to point out some of the methodological as well as logical fallacies that we believe to exist in this field. It seems that due to the designs employed in research on political socialisation, results neither are clearcut nor provide a foundation for curriculum construction. The use of research schemes designed for the study of achievement in an area which focuses on values, attitudes and behavioral patterns, appears to be the source of this fallacy.

Third, keeping in mind the two points discussed above, the empirical data on civics produced by the I.E.A.'s Six subject survey are examined. This is carried out with reference to four research questions:

1. The relationships between cognitive achievements and the possession of informed socio-political attitudes. We assess whether "civic knowledge" distributes in the same manner as knowledge in other areas, and whether better access to information insures greater knowledge.

2. The relationships between socio-political attitudes and students' backgrounds. The literature on this matter reveals that attitudes distribute according to socio-economic background. If this is found to be true of the socio-political attitudes of Dutch children, than we can conclude that their political socialisation is class-determined.

3. The similarity in impacts of two major socialisation agents: the family and the school. Most scholars claim that school fulfills a differentiating function; usually the educational system serves to legitimate and reinforce the system of
stratification based on family background.

4. Age differences in socio-political attitudes.

The socio-political attitudes of two age cohorts - the 13-14-year-old and the 18-19-year-old groups - are examined. The older group is expected to be more mature in its political views.

The analysis of the last three research questions are based on degree of attitude crystallisation, attitude substance and proportion of unformulated opinions ("don't knows"). Pupils originating in the higher social strata, attending the "better" schools and participating in their final year of study were all expected to average the more crystallised, the more democratic and the greater proportion of well-formulated opinions than the other groups.

Two populations were randomly sampled from Dutch school pupils: population 2, the 13-14-year-old age group, contains 1696 students and is made up of students attending vocational and grammar schools; population 4 is comprised of 1314 18-19-year-olds, all in their last year of grammar school.

All the students in the sample responded to several questionnaires relating to vocabulary and civic knowledge socio-political attitudes and perceptions, the latter covering matters such as anti-authoritarianism, support for civil and women's rights, sense of political efficacy and images of the good citizen.

Cross-tabulations, analysis of variance and scaling were employed.

The major findings were:

1. Students in grammar schools are better informed, know more and discuss socio-political subjects more often than students in vocational schools. Fewer of the latter held well-formulated opinions. No such differences were found between older and younger grammar school groups, although the rate of "don't knows" is a bit higher for the latter.

2. Grammar school students do have more crystallised attitudes than students in vocational schools, but the crystallisation of the older group's attitudes is not meaningfully and consistently higher than that of the younger group.

3. No meaningful distinction can be made between the groups according to the content of their socio-political attitudes; they averaged just about the same degree of support for democracy.

From these findings we conclude that knowledge and information in civics distributes among students in a similar manner as other cognitive skills usually measured in schools. However, this is not the case regarding attitudes and beliefs.

Hence, at least the Dutch school-system, which is very differential in terms of achievement scores, is still quite integrative in terms of its attitudinal messages. Even though it may be possible to categorise adults in the Netherlands into political sub-cultures, such a division...
cannot be made for school children. In this sense, school appears to be functioning as a unifying factor as opposed to a preparatory institution for selected ideological groups. Contrary to developmental theories, it seems that 18-19-year-olds are far from making the transition into adulthood. They are still in a state of moratorium regarding political identifications, the "finalisation" of their political commitments occurring later in the life-cycle. Because our study is based on data collected within the same paradigm as much research on political socialisation, we were unable to investigate such questions as the place of the family, in comparison to other agents like the school, in terms of the promotion of socialisation to political ideas and values; consequently we too join the group of scholars who advocate devising a new approach to political socialisation.