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Students' Perceptions of Threats to their World' Future: An Introduction to ICCS and Global Lesson Plan

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Introduction

Most U.S. teachers and scholars in education, and much of the American public, are familiar with the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (OCED, 2023) because the results regularly appear in the news as a negative headline about the U.S. rank in mathematics, literacy, and science. The PISA study of 15-year-old students ranks the scores of 79 countries. The 2018 simple, straightforward statistic places the U.S. 37th in mathematics, 18th in science, and 13th in reading (Factsmaps, 2023). It reaches the status of a lead story in the U.S. media because it runs contrary to the American archetypal view of itself, i.e., that it should be first in such comparisons. The scores have not significantly changed in 20 years, despite multiple education reform efforts by four U.S. presidents to improve the U.S position in the world.

PISA includes several competences related to civic and citizenship education but never estimates “Civic understanding” as a concept. However, there is an international assessment for civics that is comparable to PISA, IEA *The International Civic and Citizen Education Study* (IEA, 2023 A & B). However, neither the United States nor any of the individual states participate. The ICCS study receives, comparatively, very little attention in the American media or from U.S social studies scholars. How the U.S. would fair in comparison to the other countries is subject to conjecture.

IEA ICCS

IEA ICCS, since the inaugural survey in 1999, stands as the gold standard for measuring civic understanding among school-age children. The Last available data is from IEA ICCS 2016 where twenty-four (24) countries participated. IEA ICCS 2016 studies serve as a basis for policy and practice changes in civic education in the participant nations' schools. Countries as diverse as Mexico, Latvia, Russia, and Indonesia are participants. ICCS collects data from surveys of

students, teachers, and school principals and sheds light on pedagogy practices, students' civic knowledge and perspectives on national and global issues, and ideological beliefs. The collection of data every four years has produced a plethora of information from over 94,000 fifteen-year-old students in 3,800 schools and was augmented with data from 37,000 school principals and teachers. Data is now being examined from the 2022 study and will be published in 2023.

In addition to the IEA ICCS international report of all participating countries, each of the 24 countries publishes a report using the comparative cross-nations data and temporal data. As an example, Ceske, et. al. (2017) compares Latvia to other democratic nations of the Baltic Sea region. They found that Latvian students had the lowest level of civic and citizenship education in the ICCS 2016 study (Schulz et al., 2018). As a consequence, the Ministry of Education of Latvia has launched a nation-wide reform of standards and pedagogy (see Ministry of Education, Latvia (2019), *SKOLA*.)

For this article, the country of Latvia is being used because of a collaborative effort by the authors of this paper that stems from the U.S. Fulbright Scholar program, The U.S. Embassy in Latvia, Ministry of Education of Latvia, and the University of Latvia. The following are just three examples of information from the three groups of participants taken from the responses of students, teachers, and principals in Latvia Students Question (Questions please see in ICCS 2016 User Guide for the International Database by Köhler, et al. 2018) reported internationally by IEA (Schulz et al., 2018).

Example Student Question Q31, “When you are an adult, what do you think you will do [politically]”? On a question about whether they would vote in a national election when they will be adults 3% of the students report that they would certainly vote in a national election, 4% say they would probably do that while 17% say that they would probably not do that and 5 % say

they would certainly not vote in a national election as adults. On another question 5% of the students say that they would certainly join a political party when they will be adults and 18% say they would probably join a political party while 48% say they would probably not do that and 2% say they would certainly not do that.

Example Teacher Question Q14, “What do you consider the most important aims of civic and citizenship education at school?” 28% of the teachers report that one of the most important aims of civic citizenship education at school is promoting knowledge of social, political and civic institutions, while 11% think that it is preparing students for future political engagement. However, 6% think that it is promoting students' critical and independent thinking.

Example Principals Question Q13, “How is civic and citizenship education taught at this at eight grade?” 59% of the principals report that civic education is taught as a separate subject by teachers of subject related to civic and citizenship education while 8% of the principals report that it is integrated into all subjects taught at their school.

Latvia

Latvia (see Ministry of Education, Latvia, 2019, SKOLA) national standards is mandating more time spent in classrooms on civic education and democratic ideology, the United States, has seen a significant decline (“narrowing”) of time dedicated to social studies education (Howard, 2003) and deliberative discussion due to the focus on basic skills in *No Child Left Behind* (U.S. Department of Education, 2023) and the resulting states' standards (Boyle-Baise, Husa, Johnson, Serriere & Steward, 2008; Pace, 2011). Thomas Misco (2007) points out, "the change in educational culture [in the U.S.] also neglects the development of

dispositions of life as a moral citizen, which is often considered an expendable luxury in an era of accountability" (p. 267).

Historical Impediments

The Soviet Union annexed Latvia in 1940 but in 1991 Latvia regained her independence. During the "Soviet Era Occupation," Latvia's education system used a "teacher-centered" pedagogy of indoctrination where multiple perspectives and deliberations about different perspectives were discouraged, and the socialists' agenda was promoted as sacrosanct (Fernandez-González, 2019).

Open Classroom Pedagogy and Standards

Ministry of Education, Latvia (2019) has moved forward on three fronts to adopt a what is being called a more "Open Classroom pedagogy:"

A) create uniform standards that promote deliberations.

B) unlike the states or the U.S. as a whole, Latvia has mandated a nation-wide, required course for grades 1 to 9, *Sociālās Zinības* ("Social Studies") "...comprised of ethical, civic, economic, and health education" to encourage what the U.S. would describe as civic duties in an open society. It comprises topics dealing with "politics and law, sociology, anthropology, economics, psychology, and ethics" (Cekse, 2021, pg. 105); and

C) improvements to pedagogy that have been termed "Open Classroom" practices (Malak-Minkiewicz & Torney Purta, 2021, pg. XIV). The open classroom approach is comprised of the long-standing practices taught in U.S. colleges of education that are based on Piaget and Vygotsky, deliberative discussions about ideological beliefs (see,

Duplass, 2018, 2021; Hand, 2014), and characterized by the National Council for Social Studies' (NCSS, 2013) *C3 Framework*. These pedagogies are widely accepted in the U. S. as essential to enculturating (not indoctrinating, see Kelley, 1986) students into a democratic ideology. Such discussions adroitly managed by a caring teacher well-versed in the complexities of a democratic ideology are essential to students reflecting on their democratic civic and personal identity (Duplass, 2021; Hart & Wilkenfeld, 2011, & Torney-Purta, 2001).

U.S. Non-Participation in ICCS - Consequences

The states and U.S. federal government do not have a large data survey like the ICCS. Participating in ICCS would benefit policy makers in the U.S because the comparative and longitudinal data could be used by the U.S. policy makers to see if reforms were having an effect on students' "life as a moral citizen." Each state of the United States, if they were participants in ICCS, would be able to make comparisons to other states and internationally. Just as *No Child Left Behind* legislation (U.S. Department of Education, 2023) provided incentives for states to collect data on basic skills, similar legislation would likely be needed in the U.S. to reestablish the importance of civic education and create the assessments to measure progress in civic knowledge and dispositions.

Global Civics Education Lesson Plan:

During the process of reviewing the 2016 ICCS data, the authors of this paper saw the opportunity to repurpose ICCS data to create several civic and global lesson plans for U.S. students. This lesson plan focuses on the ICCS 2016 (Schulz et al., 2018, p. 131) question "To what extent do you think the following issues are a threat to the world's future." The lesson

would follow the NCSS' *C3 Framework* "investigations approach" (NCSS. 2013); integrate the use of technology and mathematics (statistics); and lead to the kind of deliberative critical thinking and discussions among students and teachers that are needed to model and form a democratic civic identity (Duplass, 2021).

Step 1: Set Focus: Display *Handout 1A* and explain what the ICCS study is, that the lesson will include the results about how eighth grade students from across the planet responded to the survey in 2016. Explain that the class will investigate responses from select countries to try and understand the variables that may have led to the different rankings of the "threats" and compare those to the class's rankings of threats.

Handout 1A: Threats to the World's Future

[insert handout here]

The Key Questions for the investigation are:

1. To what extent do you think the following issues are a threat to the world's future?
2. What variables might account for differences in the ranking between countries, using the categorical framework drawn from the *World Factbook (CIA, 2023)* "Geography, People and Society, Environment, Government, Economy, Energy, Communications, Transportation, Military and Security, Terrorism, and Transnational."
3. Given global events since 2016, predict what rankings of the issues might change in 2020?
4. Are 8th grade students representative of the population at large?
5. If the class's rankings are different from the other nations' students, what might account for the differences?

Step 2: Class Rank

Using *Handout 1A* demonstrate - using Socratic Method - how to systematically interpret and analyze a chart (see Duplass, 1997). Have each student complete *Column 1* with their estimate of the rank that would be given by the United States population as a whole and in *Column 2* indicate their personal rank of the issues. Have students use a score of 1 through 13 (Köhler , et al. 2018, p. 247-248), with 1 being the greatest threat. No number should be used more than once.

Step 3: Collect *Handout 1A*, and overnight, the teacher will create the *Handout 1B* version with the class rankings added into *Column 3* and the ICCS study rankings for all countries in *Column 4*. This will create a composite handout for display for projection on a smart board. Return *Handout 1A* to each student and have each student record *Column 3's* and *Column 4's* data.

Step 4: Lead a Socratic discussion that compares *Handout 1B's* information asking students to share their observations, reasoning for their rankings, and eliciting questions they have about the data, i.e., “What else would you like to know?”

Step 5: Distribute *Handout 2: Comparative Rank of Threats within Country* and have students record on this handout the data reported in columns 3 and 4 data on *Handout 1B*. Continue the Socratic dialogue and have students suggest the causes of the differences based on their limited knowledge of each country.

Handout 2: Comparative Rank of Threats within Country

[insert Handout 2]

Step 6: Group research. Assign students (assuming a class of 25) into five heterogenous “Jigsaw groups” (see Duplass, 2021, pg. 195) and assign each group a country. The teacher should model how to use the *World Factbook* by using the section on the USA as an example.

Step 7: Expert assignments. One student in each country group should be assigned two of the “Investigative Categories” of the *World Factbook*, i.e., *Geography, People and Society, Environment, Government, Economy, Energy, Communications, Transportation, Military and Security, Terrorism, and Transnational*. In class (or as homework if all students have internet access) have the expert students research their categories for their assigned county to determine what aspects of the country might account for differences in rankings. For each category, the expert student should record her/his reasoning, citing data, as to whether the category and supporting data might have a high or low impact on the student’s perceptions of threats.

Step 8: Convene the experts. Convene the experts into expert groups. Have the expert students discuss their observations and conclusions.

Step 9: Reconvene the country groups. Have the expert students discuss their findings and conclusions based on their expert analysis with the other student experts in their country.

Step 10: Prepare presentations. Students in each country group should create a brief presentation by category with supporting data and arguments in preparation for a whole class discussion focusing on the *Key Questions*.

Step 11: Whole Class debriefing and discussion. Teacher leads whole class debriefing and discussion.

Conclusion

Through this lesson, students will practice the skill of analyzing the kind of information they need to master to be an effective lifelong citizen in a democratic society. This cooperative learning strategy will enable students to practice collaboration, discussion, and analytical skills while learning to base their civic judgments in facts, not just opinions, using a systematic process.

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Handout 1A (blank) & 1B (with all columns completed): Threats to the World’s Future

ICCS 2016 data (Köhler , et al. 2018; 115)

Issues	Column 1 Rank	Column 2 Rank	Column 3 Rank	Column 4 Rank
	Predict United States as a Country	List Your Rank	Record Class Rank	ICCS Study Rank for all Countries
1. Climate Change				6
2. Crime				8
3. Global Financial Crisis				11
4. Infectious Diseases				5
5. Over Population				13
6. Pollution				1
7. Poverty				7
8. Terrorism				2
9. Unemployment				12
10. Violent Conflict				10
11. Energy shortages				9
12. Water shortages				3
13. Food shortages				4

Handout 2: Comparative Rank of Threats within Country

ICCS 2016 data (Köhler, et al. 2018; 115)

Countries	Finland	Rank	Italy	Rank	Latvia	Rank	Mexico	Rank	Taiwan	Rank	Class	Rank	All	Rank
ISSUES	%		%		%		%		%		%		%	
1. Climate Change	90	2	82	12	84	9	84	11	86	5			85	6
2. Crime	77	12	88	8	88	7	88	4	87	7			83	8
3. Global Financial Crisis	86	6	90	9	89	10	87	8	81	11			84	11
4. Infectious Diseases	80	8	85	7	91	3	87	5	89	3			85	5
5. Overpopulation	76	13	75	13	79	13	83	13	71	13			77	13
6. Pollution	96	1	98	1	97	1	94	1	90	1			95	1
7. Poverty	83	5	90	5	88	6	87	6	95	9			86	7
8. Terrorism	88	3	92	2	93	2	83	12	88	2			89	2
9. Un-employment	83	9	87	11	87	12	85	9	77	12			81	12
10. Violent Conflict	78	11	90	6	88	8	87	7	84	10			83	10
11. Energy shortages	80	10	92	10	89	11	88	10	88	4			85	9
12. Water shortages	76	7	90	3	89	4	91	2	86	6			86	3
13. Food shortages	84	4	90	4	87	5	89	3	84	8			87	4

1 Percentages represent the estimated proportion of students who think that the corresponding issue is a threat to the world's future to a large extent or to a moderate extent combined.

2 Ranks for each country are based on the weighted averages of the responses, where responses "To a large extent", "To a moderate extent", "To a small extent" and "Not at all" were coded as 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively.

3 Ranks across all 24 participating countries (last column) were based on averaged weighted averages of all countries. Percentages of all 24 participating countries were calculated as average values of corresponding percentages within all of the participating countries.