

The Burden of History? Civic Education at German Schools



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1 Introduction

Civic education in Germany is taught in a subject which has different names. It is burdened with high demands, receives little specialist subject lessons, and has a history of almost 100 years. More than other subjects, Civic Education is influenced by the political and social system. In its 100 years of history Civic Education has been taught in five different systems in Germany:

- until 1918 in a feudal system and monarchy
- from 1918 to 1933 in the Weimar Republic, a democracy (for 15 years)
- from 1933 to 1945 under the rule of National-Socialism in a racist dictatorship (12 years)
- from 1949 to 1989 in the centralist socialist German Democratic Republic (40 years)
- since 1949 in the democracy of the Federal Republic of Germany (53 years)

The periods of time between the radical social and political changes at the beginning of this century were much shorter than those of the second part of it. The period after the German unification and integration of the new states into the FRG is almost as long as the National-Socialist rule was. Yet former types of state and social systems still influence the political culture, the discussion and praxis of civic education today, and are important for its understanding.

Different to other subjects, Civic Education is not merely - and perhaps not even primarily - taught at school, but also imparted outside school: through printed and multi-media documents, through political events and discussions. On the

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one hand different ideas and political information determine curricula and textbooks for Civic Education at school, on the other hand, outside of school children and adolescents are directly influenced by media, their families and peer groups. At school civic education is not imparted through just one specific subject but is integrated as a teaching principle in other subjects, the school life and extra-curricular activities. In the following I outline the change in aims of civic education, the imparting of political or civic education at schools and outside of school. First, I present central political objectives and expectations towards people in the different political systems as well as areas of transmission which are attributed to schools (2). Further I outline forms of civic education (3). Then I describe different problems of civic education in Germany at the beginning of the 21st century (4). Finally, I report on essential findings of the comparative IEA-study "Civic Education" (5).

References

2 Political Education in four political systems

2.1 Political Education at school in an authoritarian monarchy

One of the main aims of civic education which was established in the monarchy, was to bring up obedient subjects in an authoritarian state. Selection and hierarchy were central principles in schools. The separation of different school forms, the system of entitlement, pupils wearing school caps and being seated in the classroom according to their academic performances established these principles in everyday school life. The education of obedient subjects was also practised through a repressive teacher-pupil-relationship which included corporal punishment. Inequality of different social classes was already inherited by birth and then reproduced in the school career. Social movements criticised and attempted to improve these conditions (cf. Händle 1999).

2.2 Civic Education in the pluralistic Weimar Republic

In the new Weimar democracy the model for civic education was no longer the obedient subject but the educated citizen. Principles of both political and social equality, in particular the right to vote, the right for education and equality in law, were established in the constitution; and social institutions attempted to accomplish it. The demand on schools was to open towards different groups of people as well as for different curricular positions and methods. However, various compromises were made; it was only achieved to establish a school for everyone for the first four years of primary school. Despite participatory and egalitarian changes and the demands of social movements, selective and hierarchical, authoritarian traditions continued to exist. There was a wide range from egalitarian, reform schools to traditionally selective and hierarchical schools. During almost 15 years of the Weimar Republic, authoritarian, selective and hierarchical traditions remained firm and many times maintained against democratic reform approaches, that aimed at more participation, openness and equality.

2.3 The 'Fuehrer principle' in Political Education at school under the National-Socialist regime

The objective of political education at this period of German history was the belligerent national comrade willing to make sacrifices. Hierarchical and selective principles were reinforced in curricula and in school organisation. Selection was no longer justified by social classes but by race. The Aryan race, which was attributed to the majority of Germany's population, was regarded as superior. School had to prepare for this leading role. Democratic principles and orientations of the government and other institutions under the rule of law had been replaced by demands of an subordination to unquestioned leadership (to the 'Fuehrer principle'). At school as well as outside of school - and in the media, too - similar forms of political disciplinary and indoctrination were introduced: the Hitler salute, uniforms, marches, ceremonies and demonstrative events. Political organisations such as the '*Hitlerjugend*' (HJ) for boys and the '*Bund Deutscher Mädel*' (BDM) for girls were regarded as crucial for political education. Social evenings, marching parades, camps took place in these organisations outside of school, often competing with the influence of teaching staff. At this period of German history, hierarchy and selection, belligerence and the service to the 'Fuehrer' and one's 'Fatherland' were central principles of political education.

2.4 Political Education at school under the proletarian dictatorship of the German Democratic Republic

The objective of political education at school in this society was the socially committed comrade or more generally: the all-round educated socialist personality. Objectives were centrally determined and hierarchically imparted; political viewpoints were stipulated. Yet many forms and structures in schools had been taken from traditions of social movements, the labour movement in particular. Schools should not only be authoritarian institutions, should not only impart knowledge but also education. Political education in this society was so contradictory: on the one hand biased and hierarchical, on the other hand based on egalitarian intentions and traditions of social movements, particularly the labour movement. Not freedom, as in a plural democracy, was regarded as the central principle, but support for socialist principles and the existing state. Hierarchical forms of interaction and organisation were instruments of these central principles. Leadership functions for political education were attributed to teachers, also outside of school, such as leading pioneer meetings and holiday activities as well as being a responsible leader for political education at school.

2.5 Selective and liberal Civic Education at school in the plural democracy of the FRG

The objective of civic education in the FRG was and is the politically mature citizen. Mainly due to the dictatorial and manipulative traditions of civic education at German schools, there exist serious reservations about politics at school, about politicisation of school. Until the late 50s, the look at Germany's National-Socialist past, for example, had been avoided. This would have demanded a critical look at the personal past of the teaching staff. Civic education at school up to the 60s was carried out rather

apolitically as social learning or formal knowledge of democratic institutions and procedures, similar tendencies can be found in the new states after the German unification. Civic education is imparted through a subject, which may have different names and accents: '*Gegenwartskunde*', '*Gemeinschaftskunde*', '*Sozialkunde*', '*Gesellschaftskunde*', '*Politische Weltkunde*'. In addition to imparting knowledge, its aim is social learning and the development of critical and reflective thinking. Teachers should not show their commitment to political parties or issues but appear neutral. German adolescents regard school rather instrumental, an inevitable institution for qualification for entitlements and to gain access to privileged posts (*cf. Czerwenka et al 1990*). For many young persons, more important than the school morning is the private area of leisure time, peer groups and youth culture in the afternoon. Political apathy and political resignation are common among adolescents in the FRG and have increased in the new states after the German Unification (*cf. Jugendwerk der Deutschen Shell 2000*).

3 Forms of Civic Education at school

3.1 Civic Education in school life

Reform pedagogy aims at changing conditions in schools in order to facilitate integrative social and participation learning: new persons for a new society shall be educated at school. Within the reform-pedagogical approach of civic education democracy is not only a type of government but also a life style, the relevance of schools as social institutions for civic education is subject of discussion. Civic education is also imparted through everyday school life and through a hidden curriculum. In the FRG children at the age of ten still are being separated from the majority of the selection from their agegroup, who go to a different school after the fourth form; while e.g. in other school systems pupils are taught not only four but eight, nine or ten years together without exclusion at one and the same school. In addition one third of German teenagers have experienced individual exclusion from their learning group by having stayed down a year, by having repeated a school year, or having been transferred to a lower-status school (*cf. Deutsches PISA Konsortium 2001, 496ff*). Yet some hierarchical and selective traditions did not remain in the German school system, e.g. pupils are no longer seated according to their academic performances, they do not have to wear different school caps according to the forms anymore and there is less opportunity for arbitrary action of teaching staff since more regulations by laws in the school system.

Rather verbal communication than authoritative order is considered normal at school. Adolescents have a certain freedom in choosing their courses in upper secondary schools and even more in choosing topics and specialising within independent work, which is rare at secondary school. Receptive learning is being questioned, yet still dominant at secondary schools in particular. Involving and more open forms of learning and studying are proclaimed and discussed, yet rarely put into practice (*cf. Hage et al 1985, von Borries 1999*). German schools still offer only few opportunities for co-operation and self-organisation. The half-day school, which is predominant in Germany, limits time for action-oriented and cooperative Social and Civic Education. Since the pupils' representation committee at most schools receives very little scope for actions and responsibility, it is less appealing to German adolescents than it is to

adolescents in other countries (*cf. Oesterreich 2002*). Schools as a special world in the reform-pedagogical tradition are rather an exemption than common in the FRG. Some teachers and parents show commitment to support these aims, though changes which go with the authoritarian tradition of half-day school in Germany are limited.

3.2 Civic education as a teaching principle

Before Civic Education was established as a specialist subject in the early 20th century, it was imparted as a teaching principle through other subjects. That way, the '*Stiehl'sche Regulative*', for example, banned classical German literature from teacher training courses, because egalitarian and liberal ideas were regarded as a threat to authoritarian aims of political education. Concentration on local history as well as on conceptions of history such as "great men make history" and on 'national history' and 'history of wars' aim at a restrictive and limited political education in other subjects, too.

Particularly in dictatorships and in a party's concept of political education, central principles and political orientations shall be imparted through all subjects: Christian or materialist, socialist or racist, elitist or egalitarian ... Civic Education as a teaching principle in all subjects requires that the teachers are politically educated citizens, willing and able to impart civic education through their subjects. There are traditions in teacher training to acquire qualifications for civic education apart from the specialist subject course on the one hand, and traditions to reflect and discuss both political implications as well as the contexts of formation and employment of specialist subject matters in class on the other hand. Often civic education is emphasised as much as a teaching principle, that it should be imparted through related subjects or through an integrated subject, e.g. the combination of geography and history, as well as through interdisciplinary projects.

3.3 Civic Education as independent subject

Different concepts of civic education in the FRG are reflected in the various terms for a subject which imparts political knowledge: '*Gegenwartskunde*', '*Gemeinschaftskunde*', '*Gesellschaftslehre*', '*Staatsbürgerkunde*', '*Politik*'... In all types and grades of school, only few lessons - on an average not even one hour per week - are scheduled for this subject. This contradicts the high demands and requirements of the curriculum. Thus, teachers need to make decisions, and the differences between the learning experiences of civic education in different states, types of school and even in different classes of the same school are big (*cf. Trommer 1999*).

Civic education in Germany is often taught by teachers without specialist subject knowledge. Only after World War II Civic Education was offered as a subject at all universities. There are opportunities for teachers of different subjects to receive the teaching qualification for civic education on the job through an additional study course. Teachers in the new states received their teaching qualification for civic education in this way: Teachers who had taught Civic Education in the GDR were usually not allowed to teach this subject anymore after the unification. Other teachers therefore acquired their teaching qualifications for Civic Education in special courses, yet often for pragmatic reasons rather than because they

were interested in this subject. Pragmatic reasons were, e.g. for primary school teachers to qualify for secondary school teaching, for secondary teachers to be able to teach another subject as the demand for teachers of Russian decreased, or for sports teachers who were getting on in years to be able to rely on another subject.

In the old states, it is the class teachers who often teach Civic Education without special subject knowledge, because they then get more lessons to teach in their classes which they could use for tasks and activities of social integration. From a pedagogical point of view they find this very important, especially at secondary modern schools and at comprehensive schools. At the latter also because of the external achievement differentiation. At comprehensive schools teachers get help and support in special subject knowledge from a team of qualified teachers of the subject and in interdisciplinary co-operation. When class teachers teach Civic Education, they often emphasise on social learning in that they take up problems which occur in the learning group or at school. In doing this the pupils' interests are also taken into account.

There is a high discrepancy between studying politics at university in the FRG and the demands of teaching Civic Education at school. The offers and opportunities within the study course are hardly of any relevance to the teaching job later. Often it is only after they graduated from university and are completing their two years of practical teacher training (*'Referendariat'*) that teachers get acquainted with the demands of teaching Civic Education at school.

Lesson preparation for Civic Education can be seen as very intensive, since it refers to permanently changing political conditions. In Germany, high-quality information and teaching material for Civic Education are readily available and can be obtained free of charge or at a low price respectively from the *'Bundeszentrale'* or *'Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung'*. Teachers of Civic Education in Germany particularly ask for more lessons to be scheduled to their subject, for opportunities to carry out projects and for further education in methodology to improve Civic Education (*cf. Torney-Purta 2001, Händle 2001*).

3.4 Extra-curricular Civic Education

In social movements and in the reform-pedagogical tradition, extra-curricular civic education in teams, clubs, on study trips and school outings is regarded very important. Ambitious results are being encouraged and publicised beyond school e.g. through the special programme *'Demokratisches Handeln'* (*cf. Beutel, Faurer 2001a, b*). Also through practical projects, which many schools organise, civic education may be supported. Yet, there are, altogether, little opportunities for extra-curricular civic education at half-day schools in Germany. Some schools co-operate with external experts in projects of civic education. By experts questioned in the FRG, the participation of persons from outside schools in Civic Education is regarded as one of the major approaches to improve civic education at school (*cf. Oesterreich et al 1999*). The majority of teachers questioned within the study "Civic Education" declared themselves in favour of a wider imparting of civic education: through everyday school life, as a teaching principle, through other subjects and through a special subject (*cf. Torney-Purta 2001*).

4 Major problems of Civic Education in the early 21st century

4.1 Political apathy and political resignation

While the appreciation of political problems has grown even among children and young adolescents, the political problem solving and action strategy of established parties and governments stay a way behind social essentials. Children and young adolescents in particular do not feel to be taken seriously with their interests and perspectives in life and do not feel to be taken into account in formal politics. Studies found the confidence in politicians and political institutions declined.

Juvenilesadolescents show more commitment to and confidence in social movements and their spokesmen representatives (cf. Jugendwerk der Deutschen Shell 1997, 2000). However, central demands of social movements and welfare state traditions are not quite present in public discussions. For many juvenilesadolescents leisure time needs and the standards offers of youth culture have priority.

Comparative surveys studies have shown that opportunities of self-organisation and the possibility to choose a topical focus in political projects encourage political interest and the willingness to get politically involved - even beyond school (cf. Hahn 1998). German teachers assume a lower consent to aims and topics of civic education, yet they do not include the juveniles14-year-olds in choosing subject matters for civic education as much as teachers of other countries do (cf. Torney-Purta 2001, Händle 2001).

The consolidation support of social integration in a comprehensive school system instead of separating students at the age of ten in different forms of schools is can be regarded as fundamental crucial to improve civic education at German schools. To expaend a school's supply of classes beyond the morning to a wide range of activities offered in the afternoon seems to be just as important. However, at the moment criticism on authoritarian traditions in the school system of the FRG justifies tendencies towards deregulation and privatisation and achievement testing. Socialistic and reform-pedagogical traditions, however, fade are neglected in the discussion and in school development (cf. Händle 2001).

In Germany, a majority of teachers were employed in the 70s; they were influenced by the student movement and will be faced with retirement after the millenium. It is open, which experiences, political priorities and pedagogical concepts the younger teacher generation will bring into schools and what they will realise under which organisational and working conditions.

4.2 Civic Education of German 14-year-olds in an international comparison

In a *first phase* of the project within the second international comparative study "Civic Education" within the scheme of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), in which 28 countries took part, the conditions of civic education in the FRG were examined in small scale empirical studies: the history of civic education, civic education in the states' frameworks, survey of experts on their demands for Civic

Education and its realisation and civic education in ambitious school projects (cf. Händle et al 1999). In a second phase of the Civic Education project, an international questionnaire for 14-year-olds was developed, which could be completed with additional national questionnaires. In the FRG in addition to the international questionnaire that needed two lessons time a national questionnaire in the tradition of the research on authoritarian personalities inquired about democratic competencies (cf. Torney-Purta et al 1999, 2001; Oesterreich 2002).

The results of the Civic Education study show differences between three groups of countries : The wealthy industrialised countries, the East-European countries and the poorer countries of the South. The findings in Germany correspond in many ways with those of the other wealthy countries, where a widespread political apathy was found. In the poorer countries of the South, a greater willingness for social and political commitment and participation can be found and a social movement-oriented understanding of democracy. In several scales, German 14-year-olds are below average. In their political knowledge they show legalistic orientations and little understanding for conflicts between different interest groups specially for the tasks of unions.

Fewer German pupils of the 8th form intend to involve in political activities or to participate at school. Girls in Germany - as well as internationally - appear more willing to engage socially and at school.

German 14-year-olds do not show themselves very nationally identified. Internationally compared, they express themselves particularly xenophobic, boys above all, similarly boys in Switzerland. In Germany, less 14-year-olds than on an international average grant immigrants the same rights at the labour market, and more 14-year-olds than on an international average request cultural conformity from "foreigners".

More 14-year-olds in wealthy, industrialised countries support equal rights for women. Internationally, much more girls than boys support equal rights for women. The discrepancy between boys and girls in Germany is high - as it is in other wealthy countries. In this respect, the boys' attitude is close to the less supportive attitude of boys in many East-European countries and countries in the South.

German 14-year-olds hardly identify with their nationality and national history; as regards this, remarkable differences occur between boys and girls as well as between East and West. The national identification of 14-year-olds in the new states, particularly of boys, is higher. In many other questions, too, differences between East and West and between girls and boys accumulate: so, girls in the West appear to be most tolerant and most willing to engage themselves, boys in the East at least. However, as to the commitment to support peaceful demonstrations, it is the girls in the East who are in the lead. There are big differences as to the family role division. Clearly more boys think women to be less suited for political leadership positions they still attribute the primary responsibility for their children's education to women. Boys and girls in the East more than others believe that single parents raise their children just as well as married parents do (cf. Oesterreich 2002).

The blame for the unwillingness of German 14-year-olds to participate in politics and in school surely cannot be laid primarily on the teachers. German 14-year-olds assess the teaching atmosphere as open. Their, in an international comparison, little willingness for involvement and integration of migrants ("foreigners") may on the one hand go back to cultural and political traditions, but on the other hand also to the selective

school organisation, where children at the age of ten are being separated into different school forms, and on the extensive limitation of school lessons only held in the mornings. These are in most other countries obsolete. In Germany school organisation restricts social integration and participation of 14-year-olds .

As other international comparative studies have shown, both the high and the low achievers do not receive enough support in German selective, half-day schools as they do in integrative educational systems (Cf. Deutsches PISA-Konsortium 2001). The Civic Education study shows that their commitment to social integration, tolerance and social as well as political involvement and participation is remarkably lower than of young adolescents in other countries. Thus, international comparative studies underpin politico-educational calls for reforms, that aim at more social activities and participation in integrative schools formulated in Germany for 100 years, but have not yet been realised.

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