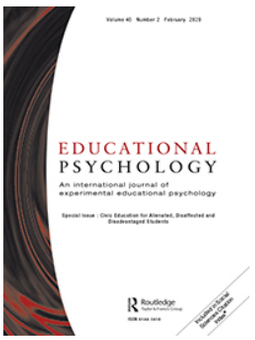

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Educational Psychology

An International Journal of Experimental Educational Psychology

ISSN: 0144-3410 (Print) 1469-5820 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cedp20

Civic learning for alienated, disaffected and disadvantaged students: measurement, theory and practice

Xiaoxue Kuang, Jinxin Zhu & Kerry J. Kennedy

To cite this article: Xiaoxue Kuang, Jinxin Zhu & Kerry J. Kennedy (2020) Civic learning for alienated, disaffected and disadvantaged students: measurement, theory and practice, Educational Psychology, 40:2, 141-145, DOI: 10.1080/01443410.2020.1710395

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2020.1710395

Published online: 30 Jan 2020.

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
2020, VOL. 40, NO. 2, 141–145
https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2020.1710395

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

EDITORIAL

Civic learning for alienated, disaffected and disadvantaged students: measurement, theory and practice

The proper function of democracy within any society mainly depends on its citizens. Acquiring necessary knowledge and skills to participate as citizens takes place through education originating from home, group activities, general education, and civic education (Branson & Quigley, 1998). Not all students, however, have the same opportunities acquiring knowledge and participative skills. This is especially the case for those who are already alienated, disaffected, or disadvantaged at school. This Special Issue is focussed on these students and their civic learning.

Alienated and disaffected students are those who have a low sense of belonging to school and less engaged in school activities with relatively poor achievement performance (Kuang & Kennedy, 2018). If students are alienated at school, they are often in a marginal position compared to mainstream students. Similarly, disadvantaged students here are defined as those who are from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. Most of those students have relatively poor achievement (Avvisati, 2018), have low level of school readiness (Wolf et al., 2017), and are at risk of becoming alienated and disaffected at school. Avvisati (2018, p. 5) proposed that disadvantaged students "often encounter obstacles that prevent them from developing their full potential at school".

In this Special Issue, five articles provide new information and perspectives on various aspects of alienated, disaffected, and disadvantaged students. Of the five articles, three are based on a secondary analysis of the International Civic and Citizenship Study 2016 (ICCS, 2016; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Losito, & Agrusti, 2016), one is based on International Civic and Citizenship Study 2009 (ICCS 2009; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010). The International Civic and Citizenship Studies (ICCS) are important large-scale international studies focussed on the assessment of civic knowledge, values, and actions. ICCS measured 14-year-old students' civic knowledge, civic attitudes/values, and civic participation experiences, as well as participation intentions. 38 countries or societies participated in ICCS 2009 and 24 societies in ICCS 2016. ICCS 2009 contained not only the main survey but also a survey relevant to Asia, Europe, and Latin America regions. ICCS 2016 as a continuation and an extension of ICCS 2009 added measurement of new aspects of civic and citizenship education such as the use of social media by youth as a form of civic engagement, environmental sustainability in the curriculum, and interaction among young people at school. The regional surveys for European and Latin American countries were revised to include new aspects and accommodate changes. The only article that does not use the ICCS data uses distinctive datasets focussing on Muslim and Christian samples. This extends the scope of current understandings of civic education in multicultural contexts and its relevance to civic and citizenship education.

In this Editorial, we first will introduce the key features of the individual articles on civic learning for alienated, disaffected, and disadvantaged students. We will then examine the

research methods issues raised by the studies. Finally, we shall make some comments about the implications for school practice.

Deimel, Hoskins, and Abs (2020) investigated "How Do Schools Affect Inequalities in Political Participation: Compensation of Social Disadvantage or Provision of Differential Access". They introduced three conditions of citizenship education related to inequality in intended political participation (inequality, compensation, and acceleration effect) and then examined those effects by using samples from four European societies: Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, Germany (North Rhine-Westphalia), and the Netherlands of ICCS 2016. The focus of the study was on examining the compensatory effects of citizenship education on the relationship between SES and intended electoral participation at the individual level. Their findings demonstrated the compensatory effects of open classroom climate, civic participation and formal citizenship education on the relationship between SES and intended electoral participation. They also found unequal access of disadvantaged students to citizenship education. Further questions might be asked whether these results can be extended to the school level.

Knowles' (2020) "Ideological Composition of the Classroom: Testing the effects of polarization on perceptions of open classroom climate among students in five countries" draws on data from Croatia, Italy, Taiwan, Peru, and Chile in ICCS 2016. This study examined the moderating effect of polarisation regarding the support for ethnic rights and gender equality at the classroom level on the relationship between students' SES (high vs. low) and open classroom climate. A major finding was the negative relationships between increased polarisation and perception of an open classroom climate in Peru, Italy, and Chile. Classroom polarisation moderated the association between student SES and perceptions of open classroom climate only in Croatia. The authors call for consideration of the dispositions of students sharing the same classroom space. Classroom dynamics can shape students' schooling experience and, unless different dispositions are considered, particular notions of civics and citizenship can be privileged. Further questions might be asked as to how classroom ideological polarisation might affect students' intention to participate in varied civic activities in the future.

Carrasco, Banerjee, Treviño, and Villalobos (2020) "Civic knowledge and open classroom discussion: Explaining tolerance of corruption among 8th-grade students in Latin America" draws on data from the Latin American survey of ICCS 2009. They examined the extent to which civic knowledge, authoritarianism, and open classroom discussion explained the associations between students' SES and tolerance of corruption at the school level. It was shown that students with higher civic knowledge were less tolerant of corruption. This association was partially explained by authoritarianism and open classroom discussion. The authors mainly focus on the summarised results of the six Latin-American countries. Although some differences between countries were presented, future studies are needed to explore the reasons for these differences.

Also, using ICCS 2016, Zhu and Chiu (2020) explored immigrant family Grade-8 students in Denmark and the reason why they are disadvantaged in civic learning. Among three sets of potential factors (i.e., antecedent, opportunities, and propensity factors), they found SES (as an antecedent factor) an important mediator explaining the relationship between immigrant status and students' civic knowledge at both student level and school level. More political discussions (as an opportunity factor) might slightly help immigrant students, whereas the effect of their disadvantage in SES is dominant. However, given the high education expenditure in Denmark, questions might be asked whether the results of this model can be extended to countries with low education expenditure. Indeed, a different picture was shown in Hong Kong, where mainland Chinese immigrant students had a

higher level of civic knowledge at both the student and school level; moreover, unlike the Denmark case where school variance accounts for 17%, quite a large amount of variance (48%) was explained at the school level in Hong Kong (Zhu, Kennedy, Mok, & Halse, 2019). Future studies can be conducted to examine how the study's framework regarding the three sets of factors can be applied in other counties/societies.

Moving away from secondary analyses of ICCS, Van Droogenbroeck and Spruyt (2020) examined "Social pressure for religious conformity and anti-gay sentiment among Muslim and Christian youth" enrolled in secondary education in Flanders. They examined social variation in perceived social pressure for religious conformity among them and investigated the associations between religious conformity pressure and anti-gay sentiment under the framework of social identity theory. It was shown that Muslim youth are more socially economically disadvantaged and perceived more religious conformity pressure than Christians. There were positive relationships between religious conformity pressure and anti-gay sentiment for both Christian and Muslim youth. When measuring religious behaviour for two groups of youth, they used a specific item for each group. Specifically, they asked whether students go to church regularly if they are Christian and whether they strictly follow the religious prescriptions if they are Muslim. Theoretically, these two variables are both measuring religious behaviour, where, operationally, they were considered as different variables in the model for each group of students. Although not the key variable in this study, future studies can explore how to measure religious behaviour for peoples of different religions on the same scale.

Besides extending the literature related to civic knowledge for alienated, disaffected, and disadvantaged students, this Special Issue also provides some insights regarding methods for the research. First of all, multilevel statistical analysis was employed in all the articles. Unlike single-level analysis, which conflates student- and school-level effects resulting in biased results (Muthén & Satorra, 1995), the effects can be understood at both levels and the cross-level similarities and differences can be examined. For instance, Deimel et al. (2020) examined the moderation effect of SES in intended electoral participation at the student level but only direct effect at the school level. Alternatively, Knowles (2020) examined the direct effect of SES in students' sense of open classroom climate at the student level, but the moderation effect at the school level.

Another highlight of this special issue is the innovative using of multiple group analysis. Carrasco et al. (2020), Deimel et al. (2020), and Knowles (2020) used this technique to examine the similarity and differences regarding factors in civic learning for alienated, disaffected or disadvantaged students across different countries, whereas Van Droogenbroeck and Spruyt (2020) examined the relationship between perceived social pressure for religious conformity and anti-gay sentiment on Christian and Muslim youth. Beyond these cross-group comparisons, Carrasco et al. (2020) also constrained the parameters for the same pathway to be equal across countries and obtained a summary of the results across countries. This provides another method to summarise results across groups in addition to taking the mean of the results.

Third, some measurement methods can be applied to future studies. Deimel et al. (2020) operationally defined disadvantaged students' unequal access to citizenship education as significant regression coefficients of SES on three citizenship education variables: open classroom climate, participation in civic activities at school, and formal citizenship education. They also defined a compensatory (or acceleration) effect as the negative (or positive) interaction between SES and these citizenship education variables when studying their intended electoral participation. This is not the first application of this measurement method (Campbell, 2008); however, more studies can be conducted with this method in equity studies related to civic learning. Knowles' (2020) definition of classroom ideological

polarisation is another innovation in measurement. Specifically, he employed a latent class analysis to identify the low- and high- SES students and operationally assess ideological polarisation by calculating the classroom averaged gap between low- and high- SES students in support for gender equality and ethnic rights. These creative operational definitions provide insights for future studies in equity and classroom polarisation.

The use of advanced measurement techniques to explore and enhance theoretical understandings and frameworks is an important contribution made by the studies reported in this Special Issue. The role of measurement in advancing theory deserves more attention than it currently receives, especially in relation to social theory that underpins these studies. Trying to capture the complex social processes that characterise schools and their students, converting them to measurable constructs, examining the relationship between these constructs and assessing the implications for theory development is a fundamental research strategy. Yet it is fraught with potential problems. On the one hand, measurement experts will be wary of any attempt at measurement they deem to be imperfect. On the other, theorists will often be reluctant to rely on numbers alone. Yet the articles reported here show that careful and precise measurement can lead to equally exciting theoretical insights. Measurement experts and social theorists working together make excellent research teams and we would encourage such collaborations in the field of civic learning.

Finally, while diversity is a popular construct in education discourse highlighting difference, it also signals the need for inclusion. That is, while schools and their classrooms are in general reflective of differences in the broader society, the challenge is to provide inclusive learning environments that can benefit all students. Yet when it comes to civic learning there is not a great deal of literature that highlights the need to cater for differences in the classroom with the exception being Kuang and Kennedy (2018).

The assumption seems to be that since all students are part of a common citizenship, civic learning should be the same for all students. Yet the studies in this Special Issue have shown how multiple indicators of disadvantage and disaffection can impact on civic learning. It may well be that societies strive for a common and inclusive citizenship. Yet pathways towards that citizenship need to take account of the diversity that exists both in society and in classrooms and make provision for it.

Special effort is particularly needed for students coming from low SES backgrounds. In one sense this is not a new finding since educational research over and over again points to the importance of SES as a variable influencing learning. Yet in this particular case, the studies reported here are saying that this is also true for civic learning. While there may be common values and common knowledge for all students, reaching these outcomes will require careful thinking for different groups of students. It may mean richer resource material, more field work, more class discussion, the involvement of parents, or a greater focus on generic skills. Teachers need to respond to diversity with such proactive strategies that can help to make learning more inclusive.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the Central Reserve Allocation Committee and the Faculty of Education and Human Development of The Education University of Hong Kong (Project No. 03A28) for supporting this study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References

Avvisati, F. (2018). *In which countries and schools do disadvantaged students succeed?* PISA in Focus, No. 80. Paris: OECD.

Branson, M. S., & Quigley, C. N. (1998). *The role of civic education*. Calabasas, CA: Center for Civic Education. Retrieved from http://www.civiced.org/papers/articles_role.html.

Campbell, D. E. (2008). Voice in the classroom: How an open classroom climate fosters political engagement among adolescents. *Political Behavior*, *30*(4), 437–454. doi:10.1007/s11109-008-9063-z

Carrasco, D., Banerjee, R., Treviño, E., & Villalobos, C. (2020). Civic knowledge and open classroom discussion: Explaining tolerance of corruption among 8th-grade students in six countries from Latin America. *Educational Psychology*, *40*(2), 186–206.

Deimel, D., Hoskins, B., & Abs, H. J. (2020). How do schools affect inequalities in political participation: Compensation of social disadvantage or provision of differential access? *Educational Psychology*, *40*(2), 146–166. doi:10.1080/01443410.2019.1645305

Knowles, R. T. (2020). Ideological composition of the classroom: Testing the effects of polarization on perceptions of open classroom climate among students in five countries. *Educational Psychology*, *40*(2), 167–185. doi:10.1080/01443410.2019.1622650

Kuang, X. X., & Kennedy, K. J. (2018). Alienated and disaffected students: Exploring the civic capacity of 'Outsiders' in Asian societies. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, *19*(1), 111–135. doi:10.1007/s12564-018-9520-2

Muthén, B. O., & Satorra, A. (1995). Complex sample data in Structural Equation Modeling. *Sociological Methodology*, *25*(1995), 267–316. doi:10.2307/271070

Schulz, W., Ainley, J., Fraillon, J., Kerr, D., & Losito, B. (2010). *ICCS 2009 international report: Civic knowledge, attitudes, and engagement among lower-secondary school students in 38 countries*. Retrieved from http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED520018

Schulz, W., Ainley, J., Fraillon, J., Losito, B., & Agrusti, G. (2016). *IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2016 Assessment Framework*. Amsterdam: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

Van Droogenbroeck, F., & Spruyt, B. (2020). Social pressure for religious conformity and anti-gay sentiment among Muslim and Christian youth. *Educational Psychology*, *40*(2), 227–248. doi:10.1080/01443410.2019.1622651

Wolf, S., Magnuson, K. A., & Kimbro, R. T. (2017). Family poverty and neighborhood poverty: Links with children's school readiness before and after the great recession *Children and Youth Services Review*, *79*, 368–384. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.040

Zhu, J., & Chiu, M. M. (2020). Immigrant students in Denmark: Why are they disadvantaged in civic learning? *Educational Psychology*, *40*(2), 207–226. doi:10.1080/01443410.2019.1657560

Zhu, J., Kennedy, K. J., Mok, M. M. C., & Halse, C. M. (2019). Chinese immigrant students in Hong Kong: Exploring performance and influences on their civic learning. *PsyCh Journal*, *8*(4), 465–479. doi:10.1002/pchj.260

Xiaoxue Kuang
Dongguan University of Technology, China
The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
Kuangxiaoxue2006@126.com

Jinxin Zhu
The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
jxzhu@eduhk.hk

Kerry J. Kennedy
The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
kerryk@eduhk.hk