Editorial Introduction: The Role of Assessment in Educating Democratic Citizens

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As the articles for this, the fifth issue of our journal, began to take final form, we realized that we had inadvertently compiled a "thematic section" on issues of evaluation and assessment. The fact that such a grouping of articles came together speaks to the salience of this matter for the field of practice and scholarship known as democratic citizenship education (DCE). Now more than ever, we have vital debates in the field about how best to assess programs and practices for educating democratic citizens. After all, our field presents some of the most notoriously difficult challenges of assessment, especially as we move from a legacy of instruction in bodies of standardized knowledge toward the formation of dispositions, competencies, and values. Assessment of such formation must be contextually sensitive and methodologically complex. It is one thing to measure mathematical knowledge or competence in a 6th grade student. But how do we measure or assess the achievement of citizenship competencies? More broadly still, what do our assessment practices themselves say about the relationship between democracy, knowledge, and education policymaking?

It is to this latter question, especially, that our first two articles speak. U.S.-based education scholars Terrence Mason and Ginette Delandshere offer a searching critique in their article, "Citizens not Research Subjects: Toward a More Democratic Civic Education Inquiry Methodology." Through a review of several recent and prominent civic education studies, Mason and Delandshere raise questions about the consistency between prevailing research methods and the principles that underlie democratic participation and action, especially inclusion, dialogue, and deliberation. They worry that large-scale quantitative studies contradict some of the fundamental purposes and ideals of democratic civic education, especially when such studies are unable to adequately take into account the "local context and concerns of participants." While Mason and Delandshere recognize that there is no fundamental *epistemological incompatibility* between such studies and the knowledge required for democratic action, they suggest that there may be a *practical*, if not an ethical one. Since they "believe that teaching and learning can be made more generative and dynamic by using research strategies and methods that support and reinforce the fundamental purposes and ideals of civic education," in their conclusions the authors offer a number of methodological alternatives.

Next, Canadian evaluation specialist Sharon Murphy raises provocative questions in her critical analysis, "The Pull of PISA: Uncertainty, Influence, and Ignorance." Here Murphy turns her attention not to a particular civic education research methodology but rather to the enormously influential "Programme for International Assessment" (PISA), sponsored by the Organization
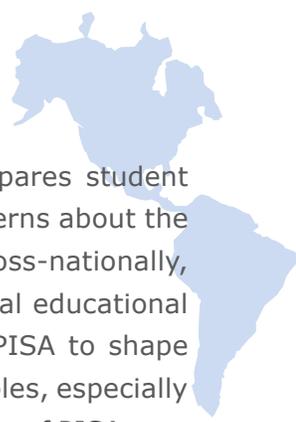
for Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD), which measures and compares student learning across many countries and subject areas. In addition to articulating concerns about the validity of the instruments used in assessing and comparing students' learning cross-nationally, Murphy shows special concern for the "pull" that PISA results can have on national educational policy. Like Mason and Delandshere, she argues that the preponderant use of PISA to shape educational policy and practice may be incompatible with certain democratic principles, especially those of dialogue and broad-based inclusion. As Murphy summarizes, "the influence of PISA may jeopardize the democratization of education policy insofar as it allows elites to pursue their own agendas with little public input."

U.S.-trained lawyer, anthropologist, and human rights activist David Lempert makes his own contribution to the assessment literature by offering his "Human Rights Education Project Indicator for Non-Governmental and International Organizations." Lempert argues strenuously that there are universal, cross-cultural goals for human rights that have been articulated in international treaties and rights standards; yet paradoxically, one of these universals is precisely the injunction to embed human rights education in local cultural principles and contexts. Lempert's purpose in developing and presenting this "objective" indicator is not so much to assess specific "learning outcomes" in human rights education projects, but rather to hold such projects accountable for the human rights outcomes that they propose to achieve through their work. Lempert presents a strong critique of prevailing indicators and assessment practices in human rights education, showing that they reinforce elite governmental power and/or allow external, foreign interests to trump local interests. Situating such educational efforts in the context of broader democratization processes, he argues that they are largely anti-democratic in that they tend to reproduce power differentials between sub-national groups, and exclude historically marginalized peoples. Accordingly, his indicator places most emphasis on the ways that human rights education can contribute to democratization: by achieving "measurable results in power balances," for instance, or by assuring that "rights are balanced within the context of the particular culture where teaching occurs, with cultural sustainability as the overall goal."

The next article is offered by deeply committed U.S. scholar-practitioners Jonathan Cohen, Terry Pickeral, and Peter Levine. Notably, these authors work as much in school settings as in the higher education academy. In "Foundation for Democracy: Promoting Social, Emotional, Ethical, Cognitive Skills and Dispositions in Schools," they provide us with an overview of the general shift in our field to a "skills and dispositions" approach from a "cognitive knowledge" approach. In so doing, they also elaborate a model for developing such skills and dispositions for democratic participation. Importantly, they draw on John Dewey's ideas to highlight the "social" and "emotional" dispositions, especially. Indeed, the latter part of their article details the importance of "school climate" for fostering such dispositions. The authors present a model for creating and then *measuring* a broadly inclusive democratic school climate. In this model, assessment provides crucial data for reflexive monitoring and continuous improvement of school climate.

In recent weeks, the results of the latest IEA International Civics and Citizenship Study have been released, and the Latin American "Regional System for Evaluation and Development of Citizenship Competencies" (SREDECC), which participated in the design and execution of this study, has been actively diffusing and analyzing the results. Given the importance of this topic, we urge all of our readers to become familiar with the IEA study and contribute to the critical analysis of its findings, along with the possible implications for educational practice.

Moving on from the theme of evaluation and assessment, we present the work of Brazilian-based education and human rights scholars Aida Maria Monteiro Silva and Celma Tavares. In "The Role of Human Rights Education in the Formation of an Active Citizenry," Monteiro Silva and Tavares argue for the crucial interrelatedness of conceptions of multicultural tolerance and acceptance with the conception of active, participatory democratic citizens. Anchored in the Brazilian historical and social context, the authors show how efforts to promote a democratic citizenry or a consciousness of human rights have not often taken multicultural diversity into account. Thus, they present important foundational considerations for re-thinking human rights education as a project of creating active and multiculturally sensitive democratic citizens.

Finally, the Australian educational philosopher Ryan Cox provides us with a reflection on the "revised democratic threshold principle" in relation to the distribution of educational resources. Building on the work of Amy Gutmann, Cox argues that political rights alone are not sufficient to warrant a democracy. Rather, a minimum "threshold" of social and economic equality is a pre-requisite for a healthy, robust democracy. In the educational sphere, this means an equitable distribution of resources for the reduction of existing inequalities. According to Gutmann, the *democratic threshold principle* "would impose the requirement on a democratic society that it allocate sufficient resources to allow all educable students to learn the skills necessary for participation in democratic decision-making." Yet Cox wishes to take this one step further and argue that "participation in democratic decision-making" implicates the broader economic and social conditions that make participation possible or desirable. Ultimately, for Cox, robust participation requires "a certain level of social and economic resources and also require[es] educational resources *necessary* – but not necessarily sufficient – for discovering one's interests."