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Editorial

## Language differences, output-orientation, popular TV series, direct school-democracy and research investment in Social Studies – Introduction to an open topics issue

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With this edition, the esteemed reader is presented with this year's issue, which presents articles from the ongoing, thematically open call. This has become a JSSE tradition for several years now.

In their contribution *Inequalities in youth citizenship knowledge: Do language abilities of classroom peers matter?*, Bram Eidhof, Geert ten Dam, Anne Bert Dijkstra, and Herman van de Werfhorst address a question that is increasingly relevant in countries where for whatever reason differences in pupils' language performance are considerable: what kind of composition in the classroom in terms of pupils' language abilities would best support equality in pupils' performance in citizenship education. They report the results of a quantitative analysis of Dutch pupils where the focus was on to what extent is an individual pupil's performance in citizenship knowledge associated with language ability of his/her classroom peers? What is the optimal degree of diversity in language ability in the classroom seen from the viewpoint of how it benefits pupils with weak or high language ability? How does it affect the pupil's performance in citizenship knowledge if his/her classroom peers' language ability is better or weaker, compared to the pupil? As the authors point out the questions are complex and the answers their analysis gives must be read cautiously and further studies are needed. But their findings at least suggest it is relevant to pay attention to the classroom composition regarding pupils' language abilities, both when it comes to their academic achievement and their citizenship outcomes.

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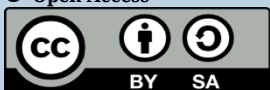
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There is no easy or simple advice to give to educational policy decision makers how to mix pupils in the civics classroom or social studies classroom based on their language ability. But it is at least a step forward to be aware of the different outcomes that a particular policy may have regarding pupils' performance in citizenship knowledge.

Readers of the JSSE are familiar with the language problem in the field of citizenship education. As early as 2005, the JSSE published a thematic issue on migration which dealt with this subject, introduced by a paper of Frank-Olaf Radtke [Transnationalism and Language Hybridity](#) – *New Theoretical and Empirical Challenges to the Problem of Coping with "Ethnicity" in Modern Immigrant Societies*. A few years ago, Beatrice Szczepek Reed and Ian Davies have published the thematic issue *Language and Citizenship Education: Discussion, Deliberation and Democracy* on this subject ([JSSE 4-2018](#)). With the paper *Speaking of Belonging: Learning to be "Good Citizens" in the Context of Voluntary Language Coaching Projects in Amsterdam, the Netherlands* in [JSSE 3-2015](#), Rhiannon Mosher contributes to this topic. In [JSSE 4-2015](#), Parvin Safari and Nasser Rashidi discussed the critical impact of foreign language learning in oppressive regimes for the case of Iran. Recently, Åsa Wedin and Erika Aho dealt with it in their paper *Space for linguistic and civic hybridity? The case of social sciences in the language introduction programme in Sweden* in [issue 1-2022](#).

Output orientation is also one of the classic topics of this journal. Its [issue 1-2012](#) was dedicated to *Comparative Studies of Civic and Citizenship Education*, edited by Anu Toots, Saskia De Groof and Dimokritos Kavadias. [JSSE 4-2017](#), *Constructing the Legitimate Knowledge*, dealt with the broader topic of educational governance.

In the current issue, Lianne Hoek, Anke Munniksma and Anne Bert Dijkstra show that despite all the doubts expressed by educational theory, an output orientation in civic education can make sense. In their paper *Improving citizenship competences: Towards an output-driven approach in citizenship education*, the authors emphasize that evidence can first trigger reflection and then transformation. This is a real gain, especially in the field of developmental research on teacher education, if it can subsequently be translated into subject didactic perspectives and conceptions of an activating and politically aware social science teaching. In the field of teacher education, new transparency is created for complex contexts of pedagogical action and the effects of one's teaching activities. The conclusion that the impact of output-oriented research will be less important in centralized school systems with national standards than in decentralized ones is an interesting position that will undoubtedly play a role in the debate on evidence-based and competence-oriented teaching and researching of the social sciences.

The paper of Benjamin T. Toll, *Using TV to teach? Teaching Civics and Democratic Ideals Through 'The West Wing' and 'House of Cards'*, is an innovative proposal seeking a way to increase political interest and knowledge among students who are taking courses 'Introduction to American Politics' at a university in the US. The study tests whether students gain an interest in politics and learn more about the topic when a class incorporates clips from popular shows. Carefully curated clips and episodes from well-

known videos, representing different visions of democracy in the United States, were used in four semesters with different treatments to determine the effects of each show and their combination on student interest, knowledge, classroom engagement, and perceived political engagement. In fact, simply using material from popular shows is not enough to find effects of interest. The used video popular content had different effects: students were more interested in politics because of ‘The West Wing’, which is focused on high ideals and lofty rhetoric, but evidence indicated they learned more from ‘House of Cards’, retreated to Machiavellian maneuvers and back-room deals. According to the study, the use of different materials in political science classrooms have a marked effect on student performance.

Media use and media effects are also a bread-and-butter topic for research on social science education and therefore also for the JSSE. Interested readers may like to take a look at past issues, here are some links to various contributions: [On the Digital Lane to Citizenship? Patterns of Internet Use and Civic Engagement Amongst Flemish Adolescents and Young Adults](#), or [Diversity and Credibility in Young People’s News Feeds: A Foundation for Teaching and Learning Citizenship in a Digital Era](#), both in issue 2-2019, [Understanding Media Opinion on Bilingual Education in the United States \(4-2018\)](#), [European Identity and Citizenship in Textbooks/Educational Media \(2-2018\)](#), [Producing and Consuming the Controversial – A Social Media Perspective on Political Conversations in the Social Science Classroom \(1-2016\)](#), [Political Participation as Public Pedagogy – The Educational Situation in Young People’s Political Conversations in Social Media \(4-2014\)](#), [The Impact of Social Media on Globalization, Democratization and Participative Citizenship \(1-2013\)](#) or [Civic Education with The Simpsons \(2-2008/1-2009\)](#).

The School Community Assembly, an experimental participatory institution, is discussed by Theodosios Sykas and Filimon Peonidis in *Direct democracy in high school: An experiment from Greece*. Starting from a brief description of difficulties and deficiencies of the educational system, the authors “believe that education in democratic citizenship should be radicalized to become effective” and argue in favour of direct democratic decision processes at school recognising students as sovereign political agents. They aim at a participation of students and teachers “in the administration of their school”, not only to improve the quality of decisions by democratising them but also to enable students to “become better citizens”. With reference to the People’s Assembly in Athenian democracy, they describe the deliberation, implementation, functioning and reflection of the School Community Assembly at an experimental type of high school in Thessaloniki. Their research questions focus on three expected results: the promotion of direct participation, the changes in the social climate and the evolvement of democratic attitudes and skills. Making use of a questionnaire and systematic observation in the field, the study provides some preliminary findings which support the impact of improvements on these three aspects. However, the authors concede that the low decision-making power for participatory bodies of this kind significantly reduces their democratic effects.

In anticipation of issue 4-2022, which will focus on country reports, we are publishing an article on Sweden (here is an overview of all [previous country reports](#)). In their country report, Johan Sandahl, Malin Tväråna and Martin Jakobsson discuss the school subject *samhällskunskap* (social science education, SSE) that is the major, but as the authors point out not the only, context of citizenship education in Sweden in primary and secondary school. In the subject matter of SSE there are elements from numerous academic fields – sociology, economics, and political studies, most notably. Also the community of researchers working on topics related to teaching and learning of social sciences in school includes specialists in the afore mentioned social science disciplines as well as in pedagogy. The institutional history of SSE begins in the early part of the 20th century when civics-style content was incorporated in the school subject history. After WW II the increased emphasis on citizenship education resulted in SSE being introduced in school as a separate subject. This took place in Sweden in 1962 (comprehensive school ) and 1970 (upper secondary school). In the report Sandahl, Tväråna and Jakobsson describe the SSE syllabus both in comprehensive school and upper secondary school in Sweden. In upper secondary school there are different programs, some more academic and some more vocational, and SSE has a different place in different programs. The authors also describe the current situation in SSE in Sweden regarding textbooks and teacher education. In their discussion on the current state of the art in research and the foreseeable future research on SSE the authors point out that the research field in Sweden has expanded considerably in the last 15 years. This is largely due to the government-funded research schools in SSE where a critical mass of researchers with a PhD have been educated who are now serving as centres of gravity for further research activity. Looking at this from outside Sweden, it appears to be an encouraging example of the great impact that focused investments in research and doctoral training in a particular field can have.

Finally, this issue also contains a book review written by Olga Bombardelli. It deals with the book *La cittadinanza digitale. Competenze, diritti e regole per vivere in rete* – in English translation *Digital citizenship. Competences, rights and rules to live on the net* – of Giovanni Pascuzzi.