

Trends Shaping Education Spotlight 13

Citizens with a say

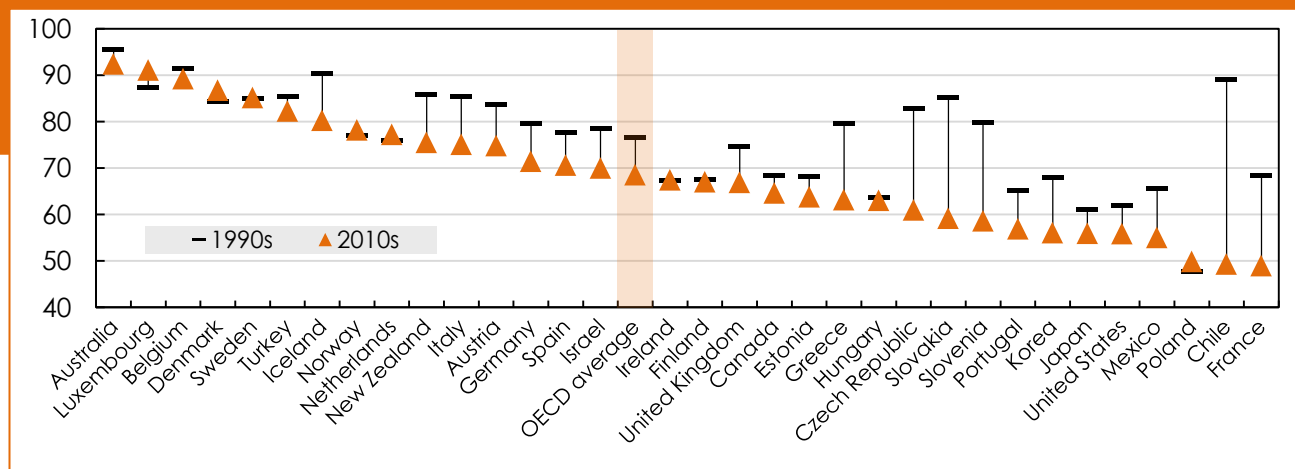
A well-functioning democracy relies on the knowledge, skills and engagement of its citizens as well as good institutional design. Empowering citizens to understand their rights and fully participate in their societies is part of the mission of schools in all OECD countries.

Lower interest in politics

On average, one in five people report not being at all interested in politics across OECD countries (OECD, 2016a). Interest is lower among the young, for whom the average is one in four. While interest is relatively high in Denmark, Germany and Japan, the share of the population that claims to have no interest in politics is around 40% in Chile and Portugal. Those aged 15 to 29 show lower interest than older populations in all OECD countries except for Portugal, Spain and Turkey.

In addition, voter turnout has declined on average since 1990, from an average of 77% in 1990s to 69% in the 2010s (Figure 1). While voting rates have remained more or less stable in some countries, such as the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden), Hungary, Ireland or the Netherlands, rates in the Czech Republic, France, Slovakia and Slovenia fell by about 20 percentage points, and about 40 in Chile.

Figure 1: Change in average voting rates per decade in OECD countries, 1990s – 2010s*



Note: Voting in Australia, Belgium and Luxembourg is compulsory. Countries are ranked in descending order by the average voting rates for the period 2010-17, covering national parliamentary elections from 2010 to the latest year with data available.

Source: author, from data of the International IDEA's Voter Turnout Database, www.idea.int.

Citizenship and education

Several civic virtues might be necessary for the viability of a political system (Galston, 1991). These include general virtues such as respect for the law, open-mindedness, and work ethic. In a democracy, additional virtues might include a minimum knowledge of the legal and institutional framework; the capacity to form and express opinions on issues of general interest (e.g. government's performance) and to understand and tolerate the opinions of others; and finally a certain degree of civic spirit, meaning the willingness and capacity to engage in public deliberation and the election of those in office.



Civic education can be defined as all the processes that affect people's beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of communities (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2013). This entails diverse life-long processes in which many agents intervene: political socialisation occurs when interacting with relatives, participating in civil society organisations, or through exposure to mass and social media. Of course, formal education plays a role too.

“Free and equal citizenship has to do with the kind of people we encourage or allow our children to become” (Callan, 1997, p. 2)

Across OECD countries, voting turnout is on average 8% higher among more educated people (OECD, 2011). These are also more likely to report they have a say in

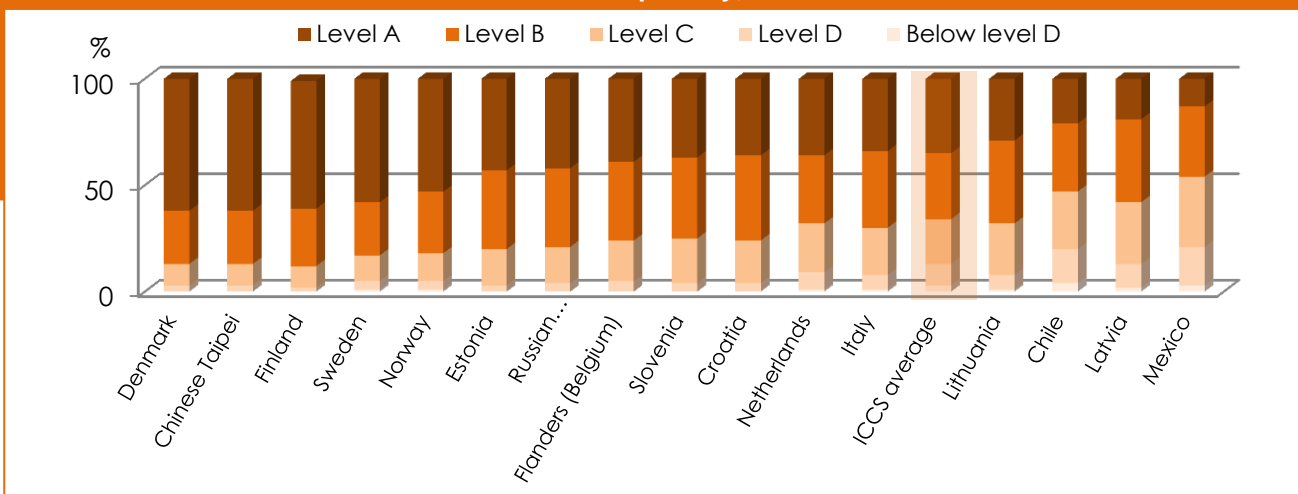
government, to volunteer and to trust others (OECD, 2015a). Existing research is inconclusive in establishing a causal link between political behaviour and educational attainment (Kam and Palmer, 2008). Nevertheless, education is a good proxy of the phenomena that lead to individuals' civic and political engagement in adult life. It is related to the acquisition of knowledge and general skills that strengthen adults' sense of political efficacy (OECD, 2016b) as well as the interpersonal skills that support them in building and sustaining social networks over time (Helliwell and Putnam, 2007).

Civic knowledge and skills

We can broadly define civic knowledge as the knowledge that people create, use, and preserve when they take part in civil society (Levine, 2011). This is, in general terms, related to a more or less defined idea of citizens' rights and responsibilities, the logic and functioning of public institutions, and a certain moral understanding (what is “right” or “fair”). Civic knowledge helps citizens understand their individual and collective interests, which is a first step towards understanding the impact of public policies and the way to influence them (Galston, 2007). Over time evidence suggests it is a good predictor of adult voting and civic participation behaviours (Schulz et al., 2017; 2010).

Students in many countries know basic facts about democracy, but deep understanding may be lacking. The 2016 IEA's ICCS assessment looked at students' knowledge, and reasoning and analysis capacity over the domains of society and systems, principles, participation and identities to provide international comparative data on civic knowledge and attitudes (see Figure 2). About 60% of students in Denmark, Finland and Sweden scored at the highest level, compared to 20% or below in Chile, Latvia and Mexico. On average across countries studied, about 60% of students do not reach level A, in which they can make valid assessments of social processes and political outcomes. In addition, female and advantaged students outperformed male and disadvantaged ones.

Figure 2: Percentage of students at each level of civic knowledge proficiency, International Civics and Citizenship Study, 2016



Note: At level D, students demonstrate familiarity with concrete content and examples relating to the basic features of democracy. At level C, they engage with the fundamental principles and broad concepts that underpin civics and citizenship. At level B, students demonstrate some specific knowledge and understanding of the most pervasive civic and citizenship institutions, systems, and concepts. At level A, they demonstrate a holistic knowledge and understanding of civic and citizenship concepts and demonstrate some critical perspective.

Source: Schulz et al. (2016).

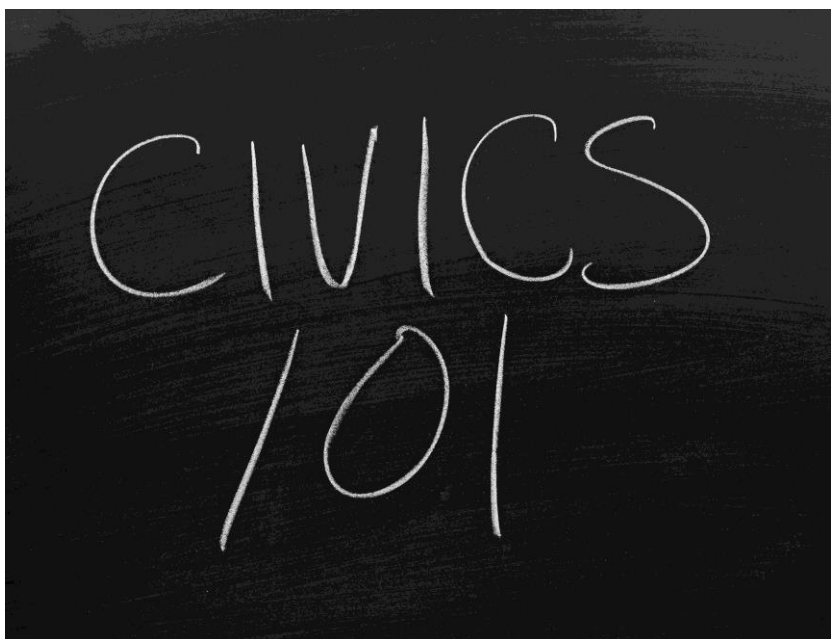
On the one hand, civic knowledge creates an understanding about the logic of political participation and awareness of its potential benefits for individuals and communities. Skills, on the other hand, are the organisational and communications capabilities that make this knowledge operational for civic engagement. It is the combination of knowledge and skills that give individuals the capacity to engage in the public life of their communities. According to Kirlin (2003), civic skills include abilities related to four main domains: organisation, communication, decision-making and critical thinking.

Civics at school

Developing civic knowledge and skills among future citizens can be done at the school by instructing students, directly teaching them about their rights and responsibilities, discussing political events in a relevant class, or as parts of other subjects. It can also be done by allowing students to participate in the school governance processes and reaching out to the larger community through service or volunteering activities.

Civics in the classroom

Either as a specific subject, part of other subjects or as a cross-curricular theme, civics is present in the curricula of all OECD countries. Civics at school is mainly seen as a tool to foster civic knowledge. National curriculums place special emphasis on human rights, politico-institutional arrangements and voting and electoral processes. Teaching civic skills such as critical thinking and basic knowledge on civic rights and duties has consistently been found to be the most important aim of civics for teachers and principals. Interestingly, development of active civil participation is not as often pointed out as civics' main goal (Schulz et al., 2017; 2010).



Early research on the issue suggested a weak effect of civic-specific courses over civic knowledge (Langton and Jennings, 1968). But this does not mean civic courses have no impact: their effectiveness depends on several factors, such as the amount and timing of course work, and a classroom climate that facilitates the discussion of current events (Niemi and Junn, 1998; Kahne and Sporte, 2008; Schulz et al., 2017; 2010).

Discussing controversial questions about real-life issues improves the motivation and engagement of students with regards to civic and political issues. To this end, effective classroom discussions: 1) focus on interpretable issues, 2) entail thorough preparation, 3) let students do most of the talking and 4) make sure many of them participate, 5) are respectful but polemic, 6) dedicate enough time to examine ideas exhaustively, and 7) include cross-examination of ideas (Hess, 2009).

The Debatbase (UK)

Created by the International Debate Education Association, an umbrella organisation promoting educational debate worldwide, the "Debatbase" is an online resource that students and teachers can use to find out the basic issues in some of the more important topics being discussed. It provides a brief look at some of the claims that can be used to support or oppose many of the topics argued about in democratic societies, from death penalty to privacy rights, and provides some evidence that can be used to support these claims.

More information: <http://idebate.org/debatbase>

Structured debate activities may be a way to organise in-class discussions that are focused and ensure all students participate. This can be done by identifying a controversial proposition and organising pupils in different teams that compete in supporting opposing views to the proposition. The broader school community can participate in such activities as audience or jury.

Empowering the youth beyond the classroom

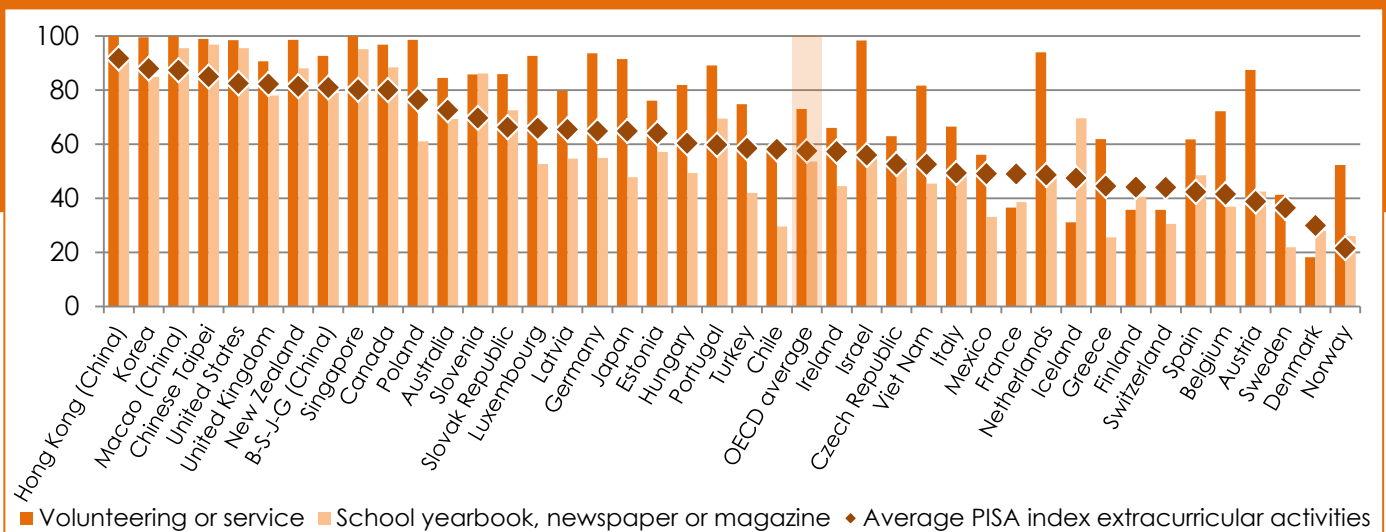
Students' participation in school governance and community service also contributes to developing civic skills and is a strong predictor of civic involvement in later life (Kahne and Sporte, 2008). Students can participate in school governance through either student councils or by getting involved in school governing bodies, such as school boards. Opportunities to learn citizenship skills outside school can also be provided. Partnerships between schools and community-based initiatives, direct student participation in community activities or mock elections and parliamentary sessions are methods commonly used to this end (Schulz et al., 2017; European Commission, 2017).

On average, about 60% of students have access to extracurricular opportunities across OECD countries

Participation in extracurricular activities has a positive impact on academic achievement and prosocial behaviours in young adulthood (Zaff et al., 2003). It is a strong predictor of adult voting and volunteering, especially when students participate in *instrumental* activities (community service, student newspaper, debate clubs etc.) as opposed to *expressive* activities, such as academic clubs, athletics or music (Hart et al., 2007).

Figure 3 shows that instrumental activities such as volunteering or service are available for 70% of students across OECD countries on average. Almost all schools provide them in Korea, Poland and New Zealand, while about 35% of schools do so in France, Finland and Switzerland. PISA 2015 data also reveal substantial inequities in the extracurricular opportunities distribution: a big gap exists when comparing advantaged to disadvantaged, urban to rural and private to public schools (OECD, 2016c). It must be noted, however, that in some systems these activities might be available to students outside the school, through national and regional programmes, local administrations, private institutions or civil society organisations.

Figure 3. Civic-related extracurricular activities offered at school
Percentage of students in schools where the following extracurricular activities are offered



Source: PISA 2015 database.

Service learning

Service learning is an experiential learning approach that combines learning processes in the classroom with community service so that students learn as they work on addressing the real needs in the community. Projects' themes can vary from energy efficiency to anti-bullying, taking place within the school or the larger community in all layers of education.

Service learning has positive effects on academic, personal and social outcomes

The experiential nature of service learning raises students' motivation and strengthens academic learning and application of knowledge, either in civic-specific or other curricular subjects. The design of service learning programmes is of utmost importance (Yorio and Fe, 2012; Celio, Durlak and Dymnicki, 2011; Eyler et al., 2011; Eyler and Giles, 1999). On the one hand, learning and service need to be well integrated. Well-planned projects will establish a clear set of learning objectives and identify the kind of service opportunity that best suits them. Matching service with students' preferences can further increase the programme's beneficial effects (Moely, Furco and Reed, 2008). On the other hand, a well-planned service learning project needs to incorporate sufficient time for in-class structured reflection, the process by which practical experience is transformed into academic learning. Structured reflection can come in the form of class discussions, debates or written assignments in which students connect their service experience(s) with the specific curriculum goals.

As students come to realise that they can make a difference in tackling real-life problems, they develop a sense of agency and self-efficacy. Service learning helps them build new social networks and develop a sense of tolerance and community cohesion through working with people from different backgrounds. It can thus help to compensate for early experiences of inequalities in the education system, such as school segregation and early tracking (Hoskins et al., 2014) and potential detrimental effects of students' cultural and socioeconomic background over civic knowledge and skills and civic engagement in later life (Kahne and Sporte, 2008; Hart, et al., 2007).

Design for change

'Design for Change' (DFC) is a programme that promotes design thinking, encouraging students to develop solutions for change in their schools and communities and put them into practice. It promotes the idea of students as active learners, capable of direct their own education from a project-based perspective. DFC started in India in 2009, and it is now present in over 30 countries. The programme is free for schools. It conducts design thinking workshops for teachers, provides technical support online, and shares successful experiences to inspire others to join.

More information: www.dfcworld.com

Only 16% of teachers reported that their students work often or very often on civic-related projects that involve gathering information outside school (Schulz et al., 2017). Teachers' participation in service learning projects during teacher education might be valuable for them to gain a good understanding of it while obtaining a whole set of other relevant skills for their professional development (Anderson, Swick and Yff, 2001). Mentoring programmes with more experienced teachers and participation in in-service learning communities can further strengthen teachers' capacity.

e-Citizenship

The Internet has provided us with access to almost unlimited sources of information. Social networks sites (SNS) such as Facebook or Twitter allow us to create and share our own content online. SNS become spaces for individual and collective expression and influence (political or not) that allow for the creation and maintenance of multiple and broader social connections (Castells, 2009). At the same time, however, they allow for fake information to spread, leading to misinformed public deliberation and decision-making. While ICTs are potential tools for citizen empowerment, their beneficial effects depend on the competence and confidence citizens have with such technologies and the use they make of them.



Students' civic engagement and Internet use

Evidence suggests that media use and information-seeking behaviours online are related to higher civic learning and participation (Schulz et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2010). 88% of students on average across OECD countries agree that “the Internet is a great resource for obtaining information” and 84% agree that “it is very useful to have social networks on the Internet” (OECD, 2017). There is evidence that young generations increasingly use SNS for information retrieval (Olmstead, Mitchell and Rosenstiel, 2011).

Yet, important differences exist in the ways students make use of the internet: A significantly higher percentage of advantaged compared with disadvantaged students use it outside school for reading news (70 vs. 55) or obtaining practical information (74 vs. 56) (OECD, 2016d). In fact, there is comparatively little political content online in comparison to creative or entertainment-oriented pieces and its creation and sharing often remains in the hands of better-off, more educated people (Blank, 2013).

Addressing online social stratification might be difficult as students spend more time connected outside school than in it (about 105 minutes to 25 minutes on average, according to PISA 2012 data (OECD, 2015b). Moreover, 36% of students (and more than 60% in Korea and Japan) did not use the Internet at all during a typical day of schooling. These statistics suggest that schools can do more in counterbalancing the digital divide of students by providing them with more opportunities for ICT use in the classroom. This would not necessarily entail expanding the overall time students spend online, but making sure online learning activities increase their digital literacy while keeping them motivated and engaged.

Digital literacy

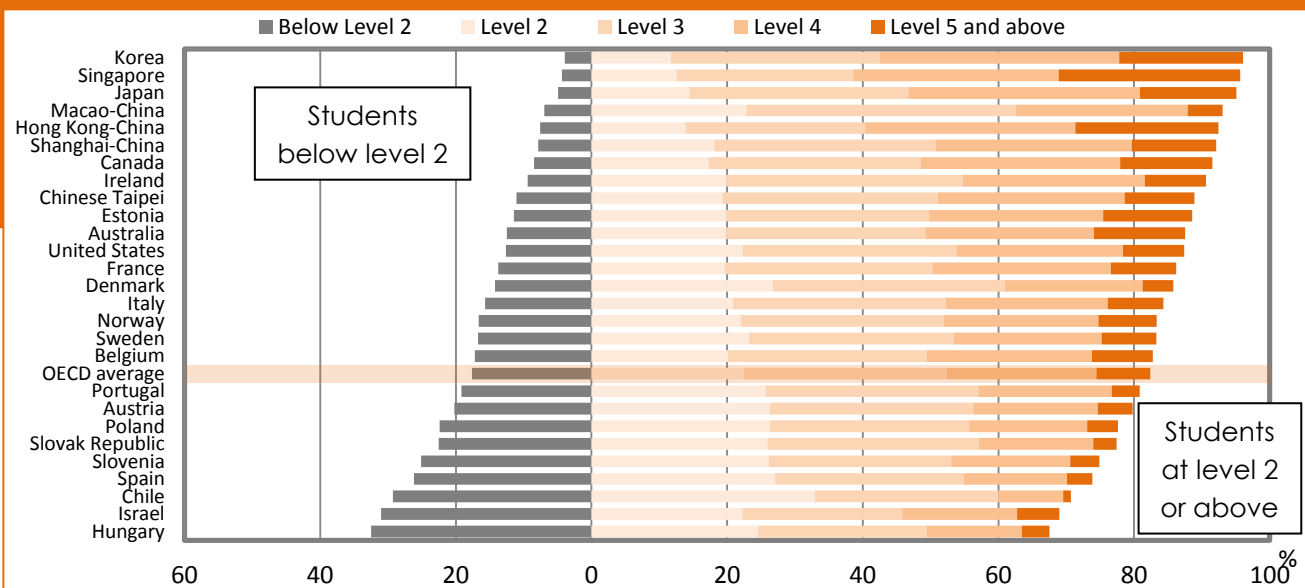
Citizens need access to accurate information from multiple sources so they can assess and contrast approaches and viewpoints. Most citizens rely on information from large media groups, which operate under professional standards that ensure certain levels of accuracy (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2011). But access to an infinite number of sources makes it much easier for citizens to rely on inaccurate information or limit themselves to information and fora that only confirm their prior beliefs (i.e. filter bubbles). Risks of misinformation and self-segregation increase as search algorithms tailor their findings according to what we already liked and showed interest in. In addition, we access and share information on SNS on the basis of trust, which is often more related to our familiarity with the source rather than to its reliability (Bakshy, Messing and Adamic, 2015; Krasodonski-Jones, 2016; Media Insight Project, 2016).

High-quality resources and guidance from teachers are needed to master digital skills (OECD, 2015c)

Citizens' use of SNS expands their potential for civic and political engagement (Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux and Zheng, 2014). Nevertheless, the outcomes of such engagement are not only

related to the types of use and its social determinants, but also to the skills in using such technologies (Helsper, Van Deursen and Eynon, 2015). These involve medium-related Internet skills, such as operational capacity for ICTs use, and content-related skills, related to information, communication and creativity in online engagement (Van Deursen, Helsper and Eynon, 2014). In terms of information-related skills, for example, proficiency in online reading is needed to access relevant and reliable sources. Good online reading skills entail the ability to plan and execute a search, evaluate the usefulness of information, and assess the credibility of sources.

Figure 4: Percentage of students at different levels of digital reading proficiency, 2012



Note: At level 5, students evaluate information from several sources, assessing its credibility and utility for the task at hand. They are able to solve tasks that require locating information related to unfamiliar contexts, in the presence of ambiguity and without explicit directions.

Source: OECD (2015b).

PISA 2015 data shows significant within- and across-country variation of students' online reading skills (Figure 4). Canada, Korea and Japan are the OECD countries with a largest percentage of students at the highest level of digital reading proficiency. These students navigate online information autonomously and efficiently, dealing with ambiguity and unfamiliar contexts (OECD, 2015b). Contrarily, Chile, Hungary and Israel have a larger percentage of students at the minimum proficiency level.

5 basics steps to spot fake news

- *Check the media outlet*; the kind of language it uses, who is behind it and what other sources say about it.
- *Check the author*; whether is a real person and has a track record.
- *Check the references*, if there are any; check where they come from and assess their reliability.
- *Think before you share*; catchiest titles do not always accurately reflect real or old events.
- *Join the myth-busters*; specialised sites reporting fake news.

More information: <https://epthinktank.eu/>

Towards civics 2.0

Differences in the outcomes people obtain from internet use are not only dependant on their level of skill and type of use. Perceptions of ICT are also part of the explanation, as they determine people's motivations and attitudes in using technologies (Helsper, 2017). Perceptions are based on personal interests, existing social pressures and norms, and judgements on the potential benefits and harms of online activity. As such, these are constructs shaped by the environment in which people grow up. Schools thus have a role in raising awareness of digital opportunities while supporting students in the development of more judicious and safer online habits.

19% of teachers report needs for professional development related to ICT skills; 18% in using new technologies in the workplace (OECD, 2014)

Through civics, teachers can encourage students to critically but respectfully engage in informed discussions while building their digital confidence, motivation and skills. Schools can emphasise the production and sharing of digital content (Kahne, Hodgins and Eidman-Aadahl, 2016), discussing digital behaviour and its ethical implications (Harrison-Evans and Krasodomski-Jones, 2017). Through practice-oriented approaches, such as service learning, online civic education might produce positive impacts beyond the school while helping students build their networking skills.

One key issue relates to privacy. SNS are considered "private spaces", and the right to privacy must be balanced with discussions about what is appropriate to share and not. The permanent nature of the virtual world – and the fact that everything that is posted is likely to persist long after graduation – changes the definition of what is considered "appropriate content". Using SNS profiles specifically created for school activity might be one way to overcome such concerns. Discussions, guidance and examples of how this has played out in work searches, political campaigns and the like are also helpful.

Towards the future

Schools will continue to play an important role in equipping children with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to understand and engage (through voting or by other means) in public deliberation. As the potential for citizens to influence decision making increases with more participatory institutional designs and digital forms of communication, schools and colleges may need to adjust civic instruction to directly engage students in the practice of participatory politics from and beyond the classroom.

Students develop a **civic competence** that allows them to.....

research, critically assess and **use** sources of **information** for civic and political purposes

engage in public **deliberation** with **informed** and **critical** viewpoints and **respectful** attitudes

produce civic-related content and effectively **distribute** and **communicate** it

build **networks** for civic and political **mobilisation**

Source: adapted from Kahne et al. (2016).

Questions for future thinking

1. Consider first the current approach to civics in your education system. Now, consider the possibility that society is becoming extremely fragmented (rural/urban, rich/poor, native/foreign, etc.). Do you think the current approach would still work? If not, what changes can you already foresee?
2. Do you think that teaching civics through students' direct involvement in their own local communities will be effective in a world of very intense international mobility (people constantly coming and going across borders (and cultures))? If not, what would?
3. What if the nature of work changes dramatically so that robots take over and everyone receives sufficient income to live from public institutions. Would schooling disappear in a post-work world? Or would it still exist and focus mainly on civics?

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