

# CHAPTER 1

## *Studying Civic Education: Setting the Stage*

In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in education for democracy. In related discussions, as well as in the statements of international leaders, one frequently hears the phrase “Western democracies,” suggesting there is a set of shared characteristics common to all. Such a characterization, however, tends to diminish attention to the rich variety among the countries with democratic traditions. Even within the five societies that are the focus of this study, three are constitutional monarchies, four have parliamentary forms of government, and two have federal systems (see appendix, “Political Context”). Additionally, these five democratic societies take very different approaches to preparing young people to be participating citizens. This chapter describes the method of the study and the school contexts in which the students in this study develop a sense of what it means to be a democratic citizen.

### THE STUDY

In 1985–86, I began a study in England, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States to explore the following questions: How are political attitudes similar and different among samples of adolescents in the five countries? In what similar and different ways do adolescents in the five countries describe their political attitudes, beliefs, and experiences and their social studies classroom experiences? Are there gender differences in student political attitudes? Is there a relationship between classroom climate, or the extent to which students are encouraged to explore controversial public policy issues in an open classroom environment, and their political attitudes across the five countries? What differences and similarities occur across national contexts in what we in the United States call “social studies”?

#### *Sample*

To answer those questions, I faced the difficult challenge of identifying a sample of adolescents in five countries. I began by contacting people

whom I had met at various international conferences on social studies, citizenship, and global education. In some cases those people put me in contact with other people, who put me in contact with others, and so on. In other cases, teachers volunteered their own classes directly.<sup>1</sup> I solicited and obtained classes of students, primarily ages fifteen through nineteen, in varied types of secondary schools in five countries. That is, in Germany, the sample contained students in *Realschulen*, *Gymnasien*, and *Gesamtschulen*; in Denmark the sample contained *folkeskoler*, *gymnasier*, and *Højere Forberedelseseksamen (HF)* programs. In England I used classes in state schools and in one of the traditional British "Public" Schools (independent, boarding schools that charge high fees). In the Netherlands, *vbo*, *mavo*, *havo*, *vwo*, and agricultural schools were represented in the sample. The schools in the United States were primarily four-year public high schools, but there was one religiously affiliated private school.<sup>2</sup>

Further, schools were selected from diverse communities and regions within each country. For the most part, schools were located in small cities or suburbs of large metropolitan areas. A few schools in each country contained relatively substantial portions of students who were members of ethnic minorities in their respective countries, but overall the proportions of such students were relatively low in 1985. Ten years later, several of the schools in each country experienced an influx of immigrants. Additionally, the schools drew primarily from families in the lower to upper middle class, with only a few schools enrolling students from many working-class or wealthy families. Truly inner city and rural schools were not included; political socialization in such areas is another story to be told by other researchers.

Through this process students in this sample came from schools in Sussex, Wiltshire, Birmingham, Warwickshire, Lancashire, West Yorkshire, and Humberside in England; Lower Saxony (Barsinghausen, Hannover, Osnabruck), North Rhine Westphalia, and Hesse in Germany; Copenhagen, Farum, Herlev, Køge, Roskilde, Stenløse, and Vipperød in Denmark; Breda, Eindhoven, 's Hertogenbosch, and Tilburg in the Netherlands; and California, Colorado, Missouri, Massachusetts, and Georgia in the United States. Because it was not possible to obtain national random samples of students in the five countries,<sup>3</sup> findings cannot be generalized to the wider population of adolescents in these countries. Nevertheless, I hoped that by exploring relationships among variables for these particular samples, and by comparing findings with other research conducted in other communities in these countries, partial insights might be obtained about the complex relationships that influence political development across national contexts.

### *Method*

Building on the work of previous researchers I constructed a questionnaire with scales measuring political attitudes of interest, efficacy, trust, and confidence; political behaviors such as following news and discussing politics; attitudes toward free speech and press for diverse groups; beliefs in equal political rights for females as well as males; and perceptions of a classroom climate in which students are encouraged to express their beliefs about controversial issues. Questionnaires were translated into German, Dutch, and Danish and back-translated. Items on the English questionnaire were written to reflect English, as opposed to American, usage. Nationals with expertise in social studies and an interest in political education in each country reviewed the questionnaires to ensure that similar meanings were captured across countries and that the items would be understandable to pupils ages fourteen through twenty. During the first administration of the questionnaires, more than fourteen hundred students completed questionnaires in secondary schools in the five countries. European students completed them in the spring and autumn of 1986, and the students in the United States completed theirs the following year. During the 1985–86 school year, while living in England, I also made visits to the European schools, observing what would be the equivalent of social studies classes.

In the period following the initial data collection, responses to questionnaire items were factor analyzed, and item analyses were conducted. Means by items and scales were compared by country, age, and gender. Frequency distributions by items and correlations between scales were examined. Field notes from initial observations were examined for themes across and among countries. Over the next several years, changes occurred in each of the countries that affected social studies or citizenship education so I decided to “return to the field” in 1992–93 and again in 1994–95. Wherever possible I returned to the same schools or identified others of similar types in the same region of each country. Some questionnaire items were revised in light of the previous statistical analyses, and a new scale was added to reflect new conceptions of civic tolerance. The revised questionnaires were again translated and back-translated. Subsequently, they were administered to almost twenty-three hundred European adolescents in the spring of 1993 and to more than seventeen hundred American high school students during the 1993–94 academic year.

During the 1992–93 and 1994–95 school years I made further classroom observations in the European schools, and in 1995 I made observations in the participating schools in the United States. I made a final set of visits to several schools in each country in 1996. While observing

classes, I focused on similarities and differences across countries to get a sense of the context in which adolescent students develop political views in secondary schools. Further, I paid particular attention to “classroom climate”—the extent to which students discuss public policy issues, especially those that are controversial, and the atmosphere in which such discussions occur. I did so because that variable had been suggested by earlier researchers to be of importance to civic outcomes. The class sessions I observed were conducted, as usual, in the national language. I followed the general flow of conversation and the student-teacher interaction to determine whether or not pupils were encouraged to express their opinions on controversial issues in an open environment. I took field notes during observations, including both student and teacher comments in English and German and the sense of the conversation in Danish and Dutch classes, as well as descriptions of behavior and interactions. After each class session I would review my notes with the teacher to be sure that I had understood the general substance of the lesson, main points made by the teacher and students, and the process of interaction. I recorded my impressions from the observation periods in my field diary at the end of each day. I also collected for analysis documents such as handouts, texts, and student assignments. Over the course of the study I visited classes in each school at least once, and up to five times, over the eight-year span for those schools that participated during both time periods. The intent was to provide a context for the questionnaire data; no attempt was made to write ethnographies of classrooms.

Further in 1992–93, 1994–95, and 1996, I conducted interviews with teachers and students to gain further insight into adolescent political attitudes and beliefs and into the process of citizenship education in each country. I conducted interviews with small groups of from two to eight students and spoke with whole classes, asking for hands to show general agreement or disagreement with comments made by individual students. I used a semistructured interview format, asking the same questions or similar questions on the same topics with all groups.<sup>4</sup> Because most upper secondary school students in Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands are fluent in English, most interviews were conducted in English. When students preferred to talk to me in their first language, teachers or other bilingual adults who were familiar to the students acted as interpreters. The use of such translation occurred primarily with students under age sixteen and in Germany and Netherlands those not enrolled in preuniversity tracks.

Teacher interviews took place in staff rooms, restaurants, and in cars or on trains riding to and from school. I asked about course content, methods, and purposes. I asked for teacher perceptions of student atti-

tudes and the context that might influence them. Additionally, I asked about teachers' philosophies with regard to handling controversial issues.

I analyzed the quantitative data using factor analyses, item analyses, frequency distributions by item, means of items and scales, analyses of variance and effect sizes between means,<sup>5</sup> and correlations among scales and items. Tables throughout the book report the results of those analyses.

I analyzed each component of the qualitative data set (field notes, interviews, documents, and my field diary) using constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987) to generate themes from the raw data. I examined each line and assigned to meaningful data segments a code that suggested to me how the segment might be categorized with others that were similar. Some category codes reflected my reading of research, but whenever possible I assigned "in vivo" codes using the student's or teachers's own language to capture the participants' meanings. Codes, complete data sets, and my diary were examined for themes and counterexamples. As recommended by Strauss (1987) I looked for causes, conditions, processes, and consequences. I shared my preliminary interpretations and drafts of the manuscript with some participating teachers and other nationals in each country as a form of "member check" on the veracity of my observations.

The understandings that I came to about the development of political attitudes among the youth and citizenship education in the schools in my sample in five countries are presented in the chapters that follow. To preserve the anonymity of individuals and schools, all names that appear in the text are pseudonyms. I am acutely aware that other researchers surveying other students, visiting other classes and schools, and coming to a similar study with different perspectives from my own might come to different understandings. I look forward to future discussions in which groups of researchers and teachers with their own particular experiences and perspectives in differing countries can come together and compare their views of students becoming politically conscious citizens in varied contexts.

## CIVIC EDUCATION IN FIVE COUNTRIES

In the remainder of this chapter I draw on insights gained from my observations, interviews, and document analyses to describe civic education in five countries.

### *The United Kingdom*

The United Kingdom of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland is a constitutional monarchy with a strong Parliamentary system that

has evolved over the course of eight centuries (appendix). Perhaps because the nation was not established following a revolution, or because it does not have a written bill of rights that asserts the supremacy of citizens (technically Britons are subjects rather than citizens), or for other reasons, the concepts of 'citizen' and 'citizenship education' are not of central importance as they are in the United States or several other western democracies (Heater, 1990; Lister, 1991; Oliver 1991).

In the United Kingdom, politics and education traditionally have been viewed as two distinct and separate realms (Harber, 1987). Politics is the province of opposing political parties, and education is to instill knowledge. Citizenship education has been suspected by both the right and the left as being indoctrinating. The few people who have become professional politicians were trained either by attending British Public Schools (independent private boarding schools that charged high fees) or by engaging in union activity. Thus, social class was a powerful variable in understanding political socialization, as well as in understanding other features of society. For the most part, pupils received their political education through their families, the media, or through the hidden curriculum of the school. As described by Ian Lister, "in the elite Public Schools, Eton and Harrow, for example, the select few—the silver spooners—learned leadership, and in the mass elementary schools the majority—the wooden spooners—learned followership" (Lister, 1987, p. 47). Whether one accepts the notion that the masses were prepared to be followers, it is clear that the vast majority of youth received their preparation for citizenship incidentally, rather than deliberately (Hahn, 1987; Lister, 1991).

Over the years, however, there have been brief periods when some people called for greater attention to citizenship education. For example, in the 1930s, the Association for Education in Citizenship was formed to prevent the rise of totalitarian tendencies that were becoming evident on the continent. However, the movement failed to have much sustained influence. In the 1970s the Politics Association and its offspring, the Programme for Political Education, promoted "political literacy," which advocated the investigation of issues in school to counter the lack of political awareness in youth. The political literacy movement was followed in the 1980s by movements on the left for peace education, environmental education, and antiracist education which in turn were followed by countermovements against what the right called "appeasement education" and for a return to "the basics."

The interest in citizenship preparation expressed during the political literacy movement was not heard in parliamentary debates over the "active citizen's" role in the 1980s. Similarly, when the 1986 Education

Reform Bill, which instituted radical changes in the control of education, was debated, citizenship education was of little concern. Rather, the educational reforms focused on a redistribution of power. The previous autonomy of local education authorities diminished as schools were permitted to “opt out” of the local authority to become “grant maintained” and receive funding directly from the office of the secretary of state for education.

Whereas previously curricula were determined by individual school staffs and local authorities, under the 1988 Education Act all state schools became responsible for teaching a national curriculum and for administering national assessments at four key stages (ages seven, eleven, fourteen, and sixteen). The national curriculum includes the teaching of the specific subjects of history or geography, which were to be assessed at the four key stages. Citizenship was identified as a cross-curricular theme—along with environmental education and health education—to be infused into other subjects and not specifically assessed. Today the primary incentive for schools to provide citizenship education seems to be that teams of school inspectors for the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) look for evidence of social, cultural, moral, and spiritual development.

In the 1990s, several centers continue to support citizenship education by providing in-service training for teachers and developing teacher and student materials. The Centre for Citizenship Education at the University of Leicester, the Citizenship Foundation in London, and the Education Department at the University of York remain active in the area. The Politics Association is a professional association whose members tend to teach Advanced (A) level Politics to a relatively small number of students ages sixteen through eighteen. Their interest focuses on preparation for A-level Politics exams.

While not explicitly preparing youth for citizenship, British schools do send implicit messages about citizenship in a variety of ways. For example, elements of the ethos of the British school, such as the wearing of uniforms, the presentation of moral messages at daily (or, at least, twice weekly) assemblies, and schoolwide charity drives all carry civic messages. Additionally, a secondary school prospectus, which is given to visitors, typically says that all year 9 students follow a common curriculum that includes all subjects in the national curriculum (history, geography, maths, English, instructional technology, a foreign language, and science). In year 10, students begin their two-year “options” that prepare them for General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) exams (taken at ages fifteen to sixteen, replacing the old O-levels).

History and geography classes are the subjects in the national curriculum that might be expected to carry messages related to citizenship.

However, their purpose is primarily to teach the academic subjects, not to achieve another end, such as preparing citizens for democratic participation (Lister, 1991). In history and geography classes, teachers typically review material that is on the syllabus for the exam that the particular class will take. The history teachers I observed were masters at telling stories and historical anecdotes to hold their young pupils' attention. The geography teachers drew on their deep knowledge of the discipline to explain geographic theories and information such as that on energy use in Britain. Students take notes and "revise" (study) for exams given at the end of each year. Some schools require religious education or religious studies (RE/RS) as a separate subject for one or two lessons a week; others integrate it with personal and social education.

Many schools require in addition to national curriculum subjects one or two lessons per week (thirty-five to ninety minutes) in something called "personal and social education" (PSE). The course usually contains lessons in health, sex education, and careers preparation. It is not assessed; that is, one does not take a GCSE exam in PSE. As part of the course, year 10 students often have a week of work experience in a local business or service agency. Because much attention is given to career awareness and preparation for work, the course is often coordinated by the school's career officer, with teachers of all subjects teaching PSE groups.

PSE lessons tend to focus on personal decision-making. Photocopied exercises and videos are usually the stimulus for small group discussions. Typical lessons focus on identifying one's strengths and interests related to careers, equal opportunities and gender stereotyping, traffic safety, and alcohol and drug abuse. In some schools local Members of Parliament (MPs) are invited to be guest speakers when the students "do politics."

At both the independent "Public Schools" and state schools, exposure to controversial public policy issues occurs primarily in a course called General Studies (GS) for students who stay in school past age sixteen. Such a course, which, like PSE, is not usually assessed, is the one common experience for "sixth formers" (years 12 and 13, ages sixteen to eighteen), with the remainder of the two-year program devoted to preparing for A-level exams.<sup>6</sup> Students hear speakers and discuss issues, but as with PSE usually each week's lesson focuses on a different topic. There are no textbooks, no homework, and for most students, no exams.

There is a strong pastoral system in British schools. Tutor groups are clusters of approximately twenty students under the responsibility of one teacher who provides student guidance, contacts parents, and often teaches the personal and social education component of the curriculum.



Because tutor groups are often the basis for personal and social education, a mathematics or foreign language teacher is as likely to teach the subject as is a history or health teacher. Often tutor groups elect members to a year or school council, which plans parties, raises money for charity, and discusses uniform, homework, and discipline problems. Some schools no longer have such councils.

Overall then, the citizenship education that does occur in British schools happens indirectly in the pursuit of academic and personal development goals. In such a context, it is not surprising that despite the Government policy that citizenship was to be a cross-curricular theme in the national curriculum, in my visits to secondary schools in 1993–96, no teacher mentioned the government publication on citizenship guidelines, and the publication was not visible in any of the classrooms I visited.

### *Denmark*

Denmark, like the United Kingdom, is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary form of government that has evolved over hundreds of years. However, in Denmark, unlike Britain, proportional representation, a multitude of political parties, and the need for compromise are important to the political context (appendix). Danish educational traditions, particularly with respect to citizenship education, are distinctly different from those of Britain as described in the last section.

Danish students attend a *folkeskole* until age sixteen, when they make the choice to stay an additional year, go to work, or begin their further studies in a commercial or vocational school or a *gymnasium* (academic, university preparation). The *folkeskole* law emphasizes that a primary purpose of the school is to model democracy in order to prepare citizens for participation and decision making. Toward that end, until 1994 there was, by law, a scheduled weekly class meeting in which students from the first grade on discussed and resolved class and school problems, heard from and advised their representatives to the student council, and decided on topics to be studied and methods to be used. Although in 1994 the law changed, no longer requiring a scheduled class meeting, the new law still encourages teachers to take advantage of every possible opportunity for student decision making. The student council has a budget from the school council or board. Further, the student council elects two student representatives to the school board. Student representatives have equal voice with the two teacher representatives and five to seven parents on the *folkeskole* board.

A pervasive atmosphere of participation and democratic learning is found in *folkeskole* classes. The classroom climate is generally relaxed:

students call their teachers by their first name, and students and teachers alike are frequently dressed in jeans and sport shoes. A class of students usually stays together with the same class teacher from the first through the ninth or tenth grade. However, it is not unusual for a class to have one main teacher through the primary grades and another in the upper grades. When the children are in the primary grades, their class teacher (with a support teacher for some lessons in some communities) normally teaches most of their lessons. As the students mature, specialist teachers begin to teach them in some subjects, and their class teacher teaches other students in his or her specialty subjects. Usually their class teacher continues to teach them in Danish and contemporary studies (a subject under the old law which focused on the investigation of contemporary issues) or social studies (the new integrated subject that draws on economics, politics, sociology, and international relations).

Using class meetings for deliberation and decision making, students in one *folkeskole* decided what topics to study in contemporary studies, planned their yearly class trips, and advised their school council representatives on such school issues as whether to use their money for a new bike shed or to repair damage to a building by some unknown student vandals. In prior years the students decided to conduct research on pollution in local lakes and to create peace games about environmental issues. At the end of the eighth grade, when they were to decide on the topics for contemporary studies in the ninth grade, students deliberated between studying about the conflict in the former Yugoslavia or the debate over the Maastricht Treaty. They decided to investigate the Yugoslavian conflict first and then Maastricht. Other classes decided to investigate the topics of video violence, drugs, and crime.

After grades 9 or 10, about 40 percent of Danish sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds enter a *gymnasium*, where they specialize in either a mathematics/sciences line or a languages line. Regardless of line or track, for three years students have three lessons in history each week; 20 percent of this class time is devoted to social science and 33 percent covers history since 1945. In both the mathematics and the languages line students may take social science at a medium or high level. Regardless of level, the social science courses must include attention to sociology, economics, political science, and international relations; and part of the course is based on a major social science investigation. Instead of attending a gymnasium, approximately 15 percent of students choose to take a two-year program to prepare for an (*Højere Forberedelseseksamen, HF*) exam that includes history and social science. In recent years, increasing numbers of students have begun to take another route of attending a commercial or technical school, in which they also take a course in social science in their first year. Those who take social science

at the medium level have four lessons a week in either the second or third year. Students who take the high-level course have five lessons a week in both their second and third year, and at the end they take a written examination in social science.

At one *gymnasium* about an hour from Copenhagen, a second-year medium-level social science class had decided in the spring of 1993 to investigate various aspects of the Maastricht Treaty, particularly as it was presented by the media prior to a second referendum. Two students compared the treatment in various newspapers, two others compared the Maastricht and Edinburgh versions of the treaty, and five others analyzed a survey they gave to students at two different *gymnasier*. At the same time, at another *gymnasium*, a high-level social science class did their social science project on topics related to socialization. They, too, divided into groups, with each group investigating a different issue related to the topic.

Students sitting in the commons area of one *gymnasium* with cups of coffee and cigarettes explained that their student council decided to sell condoms in machines in the bathrooms and on the location of the smoking areas in the school. The council also organized their school's efforts related to the annual work day, *Operation Dagsværk* (Operation Work Day) in which students took a day from school to do jobs such as baby-sitting or helping with garden work to raise money for a cause. One year the money that was raised went to refugees and another to save the forests in Brazil. Until 1997 most *gymnasium* and *HF* students participated in the program. In preparation for the day, speakers from the receiving organizations visited schools and booklets were distributed that showed how the topic could be related to various school subjects.

Finally, before turning to other countries in the study, a few points should be noted about teacher education related to civic education in Denmark. Danish *folkeskole* teachers attend a *seminarium*, or teacher training college, in which they have courses that integrate content and pedagogy in social studies. They frequently conduct group projects. *Gymnasium* teachers attend a university, where they specialize in two subjects. In the past they did a six-month apprenticeship in a *gymnasium* before being hired as a regular teacher; today they are first hired and then do their apprenticeship. The preparation of teachers with specific training in social studies or social science is similar to that of teachers in Germany.

### *Germany*

Much of the German context is similar to that of the other nations in this study, while some aspects are unique. For example, like the United

States, Germany has a federal system, which places the primary responsibility for education at the state level. Like the other European countries in this study, Germany has a Parliament. Part of one house of the German Parliament is elected by proportional representation, in contrast to Denmark and the Netherlands where proportional representation is used for all parliamentary, as well as regional and local, elections (appendix). The experience of the Nazi past and a desire never to repeat it influences much of the political system, as well as civic education, in Germany.

In Germany, primary responsibility for education lies with the individual states, or *Länder*, although the schools are financed mainly by local communities. Because education is a state responsibility, course titles and content, as well as organization of schools varies somewhat from one *Land* to the next. Despite much debate about comprehensive secondary schools and a period of trial in some areas, most *Länder* still have the traditional three types of schools for students after the fourth or sixth grade of the *Grundschule* (elementary). The leaving certificates for completing programs in these schools are given after grades 9, 10, and 13, respectively, and represent a hierarchy from least to most academic: *Hauptschule*, *Realschule*, *Gymnasium*. Even in areas which have *Gesamtschulen*, or comprehensive schools, through grade 10, students are tracked for most of their classes by ability, and in grades 11–13 they take classes similar to British A-level classes while they prepare to take the *Abitur*—a rigorous academic examination. Students who successfully pass the *Abitur* are eligible for university admission.

Regardless of school type they attend or *Land* in which their school is located, all students take a course that includes civics instruction. They also have lessons in history, geography, and religion. In some *Länder* for grades 7–9 those subjects are integrated into a single course, usually called *Gesellschaftslehre* (social studies). In other *Länder*, *Sozialkunde* (civics) is taught in addition to history and geography. In grades 11–13, when students are preparing for the *Abitur*, the course is most often called *Gemeinschaftskunde* (social science) or “GK” and includes content from political science, economics, and sociology, with history and geography taught as separate courses. Whatever the form or title of the civic education course, its primary purpose is to prepare youth for their role as democratic citizens. The development of such courses was part of the massive reeducation or democratization that occurred after World War II. At the same time, most schools introduced student councils to give students practice in participating in democracy.

Social science, civics, and social studies courses, as well as history and geography, are taught by specialist teachers in Germany. Once they complete university degrees and undergo some professional preparation,

prospective teachers do their apprenticeship teaching in two areas of specialty in schools under the guidance of state officials. At the end of their university-based program and their apprenticeship, they take the civil service exams for teachers, exams containing written and performance parts.<sup>7</sup> Because each candidate has two areas of specialty, such as history and social studies, social science and English, or geography and mathematics, individual backgrounds and teaching responsibility vary slightly.

Regardless of the school type I visited—*Realschule*, *Gymnasium*, or *Gesamtschule*—and whether it was in Hesse or Lower Saxony, I noticed that social studies/science lessons were usually based on a teacher-led recitation reviewing a photocopied article. Also prevalent was the practice of having a class discussion in which students identified opposing arguments on an issue. Examples of those practices are described in chapter 5.

When this research project began the most controversial issues in West Germany were security in the Cold War era and West Germany's position vis-à-vis East Germany and the Soviet Union. Needless to say, much has changed since then. In 1993–95 the topics that generated the strongest—and most divided—opinions from students were related to reunification and immigration policies. Additionally, in the 1990s, in the German schools I visited, students were deeply troubled by incidents against foreigners.

### *The Netherlands*

The Netherlands, like Denmark and the United Kingdom, is a constitutional monarchy with the monarch serving as head of state and the prime minister, as head of the government. Like Denmark, the Netherlands has many political parties and assigns seats in legislative bodies at the local as well as national levels by proportional representation. However, in most other respects, the political system is unique (appendix). Similarly, the social and educational environments are unique, primarily due to the phenomena of *verzuiling* or “pillarization.”

The pillars or separate subcultures were Catholic, Protestant (including Dutch Reform, the orthodox Reformed, and other smaller Protestant churches), Socialist or Social Democrat, and Liberal. Catholic, Protestant, and Public (neutral) pillars had their own ideology, political party or parties, labor unions, employers' associations, farmers' groups, broadcasting stations, newspapers, health insurance programs, and schools from kindergarten to universities. In recent years there has been some discussion about the formation of a new Moslem pillar.

Although some see the pillars as a form of social apartheid in which

one interacts only with people of similar backgrounds and beliefs, others emphasize their stabilizing tendencies. For example Lijphart (1975) argued that the deep cleavages in society according to religion and social class did not threaten democracy because they were offset by “the politics of accommodation” at the elite level, resulting in a consensus or “consociational democracy.” That is, although the separate pillars stand apart, they are joined at the top by political leaders who make compromises to support the roof of Dutch society (Andeweg & Irwin, 1993, p. 35). The “Pacification of 1917” is viewed as the exemplar of this process. After seventy years of debate over the public funding of private schools and the Liberals’ desire to have universal suffrage, political leaders made an accommodation whereby both policies were implemented simultaneously. Although there are critics of Lijphart’s theory of consociational democracy, and the cohesiveness of pillars has been breaking down in recent years, still the Netherlands is a country of religious and political minorities (and recently ethnic minorities as well), whereby political leaders realizing they can not win a majority seek accommodation. That is important for understanding the context in which the political socialization of youth occurs.

Since the Pacification of 1917, full and equal funding by the central government is provided to private schools based on a specific ideology alongside nondenominational (neutral) public schools, administered by the municipality. About 70 percent of students attend private schools, with most attending Roman Catholic or Dutch Reformed Protestant schools and a small percentage of students attending Jewish, Muslim, or Hindu schools. The central Ministry of Education prescribes the subjects to be studied, the numbers of lessons to be provided, and the syllabi and attainment targets for national examinations—for both public and private education. Teachers in both publicly and privately run schools are paid by the central government based on the same salary scale for all (Hooghoff, 1995).

Dutch education is also influenced by the value that society places on high-quality work as reflected by the large investments in vocational education and the selective educational system which channels students toward various kinds of work. From age fifteen, students begin to attend different schools for vocational education (e.g., agricultural work, the trades, the service sector), general education, or preuniversity education. In recent years increased immigration is reflected in school enrollments at particular kinds of schools. For example, two schools with students enrolled in junior secondary vocational (*vbo*) and junior general secondary (*mavo*) programs in this study went from having fewer than 10 percent “foreigners” to 50 percent in the student population from 1986 to 1996. However, the preuniversity (*vwo*) schools and agricultural

schools I visited had very few immigrant students at either time period.

Civic education as a formal part of the curriculum is relatively new in the Netherlands. In 1968 *maatschappijleer*, or “study of society,” was introduced for the purpose of social and political education. During the years of this study it moved from an experimental course to a compulsory non-examined course for students twelve to sixteen years old (for two lessons per week for one year or for one lesson a week for two years). Since 1990 it has also been offered (in a two-year course for four lessons per week) as an option for the national exam at the end of secondary school. My informants agreed that over its twenty-year history, however, the course remained a comparatively low-status subject and fewer than 10 percent of the schools offered it for the exam. One teacher explained that civic education is a cross-curricular responsibility. Not surprisingly, then, in 1996 and 1997 when a new “profile” system was adopted to be put in place for upper-secondary students (sixteen and older) there was debate about whether *maatschappijleer* would be required at all or in combination with history.<sup>8</sup>

In the Netherlands, I observed *maatschappijleer*, history, geography, and religion classes at a variety of school types: preuniversity (*vwo*), general education (*mavo*, *havo*) and vocational schools (*vbo*) including agricultural schools (administered by the Ministry of Agriculture rather than the Ministry for Education). The various school types serve secondary students from ages twelve through eighteen/nineteen and vary in the type of job or further education for which students are preparing, as well as the length of the program (for example, a four-year *mavo*, five-year *havo*, and six-year *vwo*). *Maatschappijleer*, history, geography, and religion were part of the general curriculum that all students took through the age of sixteen and which they could include as subjects for the examinations they took before leaving a particular school.

The central Ministry of Education produces subject guidelines for examination subjects, and at the beginning of each year announces which three topics will be covered on the *maatschappijleer* exam for that year. The examination subject thus has a fixed content consisting of six themes; one topic is always political decision-making, and the other topics change every two years. Because paperback books are available that address the topics covered for the exam, many teachers decide to use those same topics for the required course. From 1985–95 the topics covered included: political decision-making, criminality and justice, family and society (including socialization, family life, sex education), work and leisure, technology and society, the mass media, multicultural society, the environment, and international relations.

When *maatschappijleer* was first offered as a new subject, few teachers had specialist training. Since 1982, however, teachers of the

course have been expected to have specialist training, which includes both relevant content and pedagogical preparation. As late as 1991, however, only a minority of *maatschappileer* teachers had specialized in the subjects. Some had majors in history, geography, or religion, and 27 percent were “other” (Vis, 1991).

Many Dutch students told me that they were not interested in politics per se or said that it was too difficult to understand. However, the students showed considerable interest in social issues. For example, at all of the schools I visited in the Netherlands in 1993, students told me that they were concerned about the rising incidents of racism in Europe. Many had participated in a postcard-sending campaign initiated by the disk jockeys of a popular morning program of a radio station. The postcards said, “I am angry,” and were sent to German leaders to protest the perceived growth of violence and racism against foreigners in Germany. By 1996 that particular issue had receded but others drew student attention in the Netherlands.

### *The United States*

In classrooms across the United States, many students hear that the colonial experience instilled in the nation’s founders a skepticism of strong central government, a skepticism reflected in the Constitution, and that the individualism fostered on the frontier and the challenge of bringing together immigrants from diverse backgrounds into a united nation all contributed to the development of American political culture. Those features are evident as one compares the political context (appendix) and citizenship education in the United States with the other Western democracies in this study.

From the time of Thomas Jefferson, American scholars, political leaders, and the public have emphasized that the future of democracy is inexplicably tied to the education of citizens. In the 1800s as public schooling spread, a primary function of education was to be the education of citizens. The great wave of immigration in the 1900s posed an important challenge to create out of a nation of immigrants one American. Despite the many failings of the myth of the melting pot, it is the case that a major task of the public schools in the United States was to prepare youth for their role as citizens.

Early in this century, representatives from academic disciplines such as history and progressives concerned about improving conditions for immigrants in the cities agreed that the schools should play a role in preparing citizens. An integrated social studies at the elementary school level and modern American history, civics, and a course called Problems of Democracy at the secondary level would play a special role in that



process. Throughout the history of social studies in the United States, there has always been disagreement over the relative emphases that should be placed on disciplinary knowledge, practice in reflective inquiry, and practical decision making within the social studies curriculum. Nevertheless, schools everywhere in the country teach social studies to prepare citizens for democracy.

With fifty different state departments of education and more than fifteen thousand local school districts setting curriculum policy, there is considerable variety in the particular content that students study at any point in their educational career. However, given the power of tradition, the dominance of textbooks that are produced by commercial publishers for schools all over the country, the national diffusion of innovations or “fads,” and the similarities in teacher training and public expectations, there is a remarkable similarity across the states and districts. The typical pattern is for primary grade children to learn several patriotic songs, to celebrate national holidays such as Presidents’ Day and Thanksgiving with art projects and stories, and to say a daily salute to the flag. Primary grade children often study about “community helpers,” such as the police and firefighters, and about the need for rules and laws. In grades 4–6, children are usually introduced to United States history and the basic principles of the Bill of Rights and the United States Constitution. Most high school students take a year-long course in United States history and a semester-long course in government (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997).<sup>9</sup> Courses in state history, economics, law, and civics are also prevalent in many states and further contribute to the civic education of youth in the United States.

In the United States, as in other countries, the hidden curriculum plays a role in citizenship education. A poster showing the presidents of the United States, a flag in the front of the room, and the national anthem being played at the beginning of high school football games are all familiar across the country. Most middle and high schools have student councils, and numerous after-school activities give practice in the associational life of democratic communities. The extent to which these features vary in different locales will be described in chapters 2 and 5 when discussing American students’ political experiences and perceptions of classroom climate.

Although we speak often of Western democracies, and it is expected that particularly those in the postindustrial societies of northern Europe and the United States are quite similar, there is much variety among their political systems and cultures (see appendix). At the same time that the forms of democratic structures and processes vary considerably, the cit-

izens of all these countries inherited enlightenment values of individual liberty and a belief in representative democracy where, ultimately, the people rule.

Moreover, for almost seventy-five years the five countries that are the focus of this study have had universal suffrage and for longer than that universal public education. During this period unique features of each national educational system evolved within shared ideas about the purposes and fundamental form of schooling.

The young people who are the subjects of this research grew up in these varied environments that have, at the root, shared political and educational values. They also participated in their own nation's form of civic education. At the same time, they were exposed to the global youth culture of music, dress, and cinema. They watched television coverage of the same politicians, wars, and environmental disasters. To what extent are their political attitudes converging? What insights can be gained by examining their attitudes with an eye toward improving citizenship education to ensure a healthy future for democracy everywhere? These issues are the focus of the next chapter.