

## Research Briefing N° 75

# The link between classroom ethnic diversity and civic attitudes in England, Sweden and Germany

There is a widespread belief in educational circles that ethnically mixed schools contribute to inter-ethnic tolerance and community cohesion by making sustained inter-ethnic contact possible. This research explores the relation between classroom ethno-racial diversity and civic attitudes in England, Sweden and Germany using data from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civic Education Study among 14-year olds.

**Key words:** ethnically mixed schools; civic attitudes; contact theory; tolerance; trust; participation



## Key findings

Our findings are of particular importance for policy makers and practitioners interested in the wider benefits of mixed schooling.

- In Germany and Sweden native majority children are indeed more tolerant the more ethnically diverse their classrooms are. In England, however, there is no relation between classroom diversity and ethnic tolerance.
- Neither native majority nor minority children are more trusting in more diverse classrooms. In Germany the native majority children are even less trusting in more diverse classrooms.
- Only in Sweden is classroom diversity positively related to civic participation.
- In England there is a negative relation between the average civic competence of ethnic minority children and the ethnic tolerance of their white classmates. In other words, the more competent ethnic minority children are the less tolerant their white classmates are.

## What we did

The project started in 2011 and aimed to investigate whether the ethnic composition of classrooms is linked to civic attitudes. According to contact theory ethnically diverse classrooms should contribute to inter-ethnic tolerance and understanding. In contrast, conflict theory expects greater classroom diversity to result in more hostile attitudes of the dominant group towards minority ethnic groups. The research investigated these propositions by analysing data of the IEA Civic Education Study (CIVED). This study consists of a large scale survey conducted in April 1999 among 90,000 14-year-olds from 28 countries worldwide.

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## Implications

- Classroom diversity is not related in the same way to different civic attitudes. What may be good for tolerance is thus not necessarily good for trust and participation.
- The relation of classroom diversity to civic attitudes differs across countries. This suggests that country-specific factors mediate the impact of classroom diversity. What works in one country may therefore not work in another country.
- If the majority can only tolerate and accept ethnic minorities as long as they stay in a subordinate position, then this majority 'tolerance' needs to be critically reviewed.

## Further information

The research paper on which this research briefing is based: ['Classroom Diversity and its Relation to Tolerance, Trust and Participation in England, Sweden and Germany' LLAKES Research Paper 4](#)

The research paper was published in a modified form in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*: Janmaat, J.G. (2012). 'The Effect of Classroom Diversity on Tolerance and Participation in England, Sweden and Germany', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38, (1), 21-40.

In April 2011 the *Daily Telegraph*, the BBC website, the *Daily Mail* and the *Times Education Supplement* published the project's main findings.

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