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Civic Education in Eritrean Schools -How is it going?

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Summary

This study is about Civic Education (Civics) in Eritrea. The aim was to evaluate the subject Civics, introduced in Eritrean Secondary Schools in 1998. This study has three focuses. First, a general progress report. Second, to assess the teachers' experiences. And finally, to study the methodologies that are used.

Semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, school leaders, university teachers and government officials were conducted. Open observations in secondary schools and at Asmara University were also made. Another method was studies of documents. Textbooks, teacher's guide for textbooks, syllabus and reports from the Ministry of Education were studied.

I met many hardworking and ambitious teachers. They are doing a remarkable work even though the circumstances are tough. The main results are that no Civics teachers are trained and no textbooks are produced for the students. Very few teachers have attended a workshop. Both teachers and students feel that Civics is not as important as other subjects. Civics, not being included in the matriculation exam, strengthens this feeling. At many schools the homeroom teachers are appointed to teach Civics. They do not have time to prepare the lessons properly and they do not have enough knowledge in the subject. English is used as medium of instruction and this is an obstacle in several ways. Most teachers do not use the student-centered methodology that is proposed by the Department of General Education. It is unclear in how many Zobas (administrative regions) Civics is actually taught.

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1 Preface

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2 Introduction and Background

2.1 Introduction

Eritrea has existed as an area, with the present borders, since Italy colonized it in 1889. From 1962 to 1991 Ethiopia occupied Eritrea. After independence, and even during the struggle, the Eritrean society has been facing various challenges.

The education system has been given high priority. Since a couple of years a new subject is introduced: Civic Education (Civics). Different countries have chosen different ways to handle these topics and questions about democracy and international politics etc. In some countries these questions are partly dealt with in history class. In some cases it is left for the civil society to handle these issues. In Sweden it was not introduced until 1962 in Secondary School.

Which are the main reasons for introducing Civics? Teaching people to read and write and teaching them mathematics is obviously necessary. And subjects like science and domestic economy can easily be seen as an investment. That is also true if you look at farming, for example. But subjects like history, philosophy, geography and Civic Education, i.e. social science and the humanities, why do they appear in the curriculum? One answer is that a society needs lawyers, civil servants and so on. So from that point of view, these subjects can also be seen as investments. You could also argue that social science broadens the mind. When it comes to Civics, the most important aspect, as I see it, is that Civics helps democracy work, and it has positive effects on the society as a whole. I will discuss this more below.

This Minor Field Study (MFS) will reflect on Civics. It will look at civics as a part of the democratic process.

2.2 Basic facts about Eritrea

Eritrea is bordered by the Red Sea, the Republic of Djibouti, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Sudan. The area of Eritrea, which covers about 120 000 km² comprises three main geographical and climatic zones: The Eastern Slope and Coastal Plains, the Central Highlands, and the Western Lowlands. The population of Eritrea is 3.5 million and the annual population growth is 2.7 %¹. Most of them live on the high plateau, where also the capital Asmara is situated.

Nine different groups speak nine different languages. Tigrinya is the largest group, about half of the population are Tigrinya people. Most of them are Christians and live in the central

¹ Ministry of Education, 2000. Eritrea: Basic Education statistics 1999/2000, p 10

and southern highlands. The second largest group is the Tige people. They represent 30% of the Eritrean population. Most of them are Muslims. Tigrinya and Tigre are Semitic languages. Most of the other languages are Hamitic. A few percent speak Nilotic languages.

2.3 Eritrean history²

Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti make up the Horn of Africa. This area has been the home of several cultures. The connections to North Africa and Middle East can be seen in the fact that Semitic and Hamitic languages are spoken by most people in the area. One important influence came c. 700 BC when people from Southern Arabia settled down in the Horn of Africa and brought the written language³. The Aksum empire became Christian in the middle 300:s⁴. Islam came to the region around 800 AD⁵.

The history of the area now making up Eritrea is a controversial issue. The lowlands were a part of the Ottoman Empire 1557 to 1872. It is unclear what happened to the highlands during this period. Rubensson⁶ claims that only Massawa was ruled by the Turks, and the rest of Eritrea was a part of Ethiopia. During the 1700:s Tigrinya was independent⁷. The Tigrinya people was at some point split into two groups, "Eritrean Tigrinya" north of the river Mereb and "Ethiopian Tigrinya" south of Mereb. Bostrom⁸ says that this division of the Tigrinya came during emperor Yohannes in the late 1800:s.

The Italian colony Eritrea was established 1889, and got today's borders 1908. It was a complicated question after WW II to decide what to do with this former Italian colony. The other former Italian colonies got their independence, but Ethiopia wanted control over Eritrea and the Red Sea Coast. They could also argue that at least part of Eritrea quite recently had been a part of Ethiopia. USA and the West were allied to Ethiopia and Haile Selassie, and also wanted control over the Red Sea coast. Many people argued that the 52 years under Italian rule had changed Eritrea a lot and made it much more industrialized than Ethiopia. Therefore, Eritrea and Ethiopia were too different to be united.

² Main source of information: Connell, Dan, 1997. *Against All Odds*. Asmara: The Red Sea Press

³ Nationalencyklopedin, 1989-1996, Höganäs, Bokförlaget Bra Böcker, article Etiopien

⁴ Nationalencyklopedin, 1989-1996, Höganäs, Bokförlaget Bra Böcker, article Etiopien

⁵ Nationalencyklopedin, 1989-1996, Höganäs, Bokförlaget Bra Böcker, article Somalia

⁶ Nationalencyklopedin Supplement, 2000, Höganäs, Bokförlaget Bra Böcker, article Eritrea

⁷ Nationalencyklopedin, 1989-1996, Höganäs, Bokförlaget Bra Böcker, article Etiopien

⁸ Bostrom, Donald, 2000. "Varför krig igen?", *Ordfront magasin* 7-8 2000, p. 26-33

UN decided that Eritrea should be connected to Ethiopia in a federation from 1952. Many people in Eritrea, especially in the highlands supported this⁹. And among the Ethiopian Tigrinya many were dreaming of uniting all Tigrinya people again¹⁰. Whether the same wish was spread among the Eritrean Tigrinya is hard to say. But Ethiopia violated the rights of the Eritrean people in different ways, and 1958 ELF, Eritrean Liberation Front started. When ELF 1961 started an armed struggle a civil war was started that would last for 30 years. During this war more and more people in Eritrea started to support independence, and when the referendum was held 1993 more than 99 % voted for independence.

1998 a new war started between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Since 1991 the leaders of Ethiopia are from the Tigrinya people. So, after this war the division between the Eritrean Tigrinya and the Ethiopian Tigrinya is bigger than ever. If ethnic thinking is coming back, and the Tigrinya people in the two countries start wanting an ethnic based state this would be devastating for Eritrea. Therefore, Eritrea is trying hard to promote national unity, but not ethnic thinking.

3 The school system in general

3.1 Basic facts

The compulsory basic education in the Eritrean school system is made up of elementary level (grade one to five, age 7 to 11) and middle level (grade six and seven). These two levels are called the primary level with one word. The Eritrean school system also has one voluntary secondary stage: Secondary School (grade 8 to 11).

In elementary school the mother tongues are used as medium of instruction. From grade 6 and up English is the medium of instruction.

The teachers are trained to teach one subject. In many schools it is arranged in a way so that each teacher only teaches in one grade. This means that you are a “history grade nine teacher” for example. The argument I heard from the teachers for this is that it is too much job to prepare for many different classes. This is an interesting difference to Swedish schools where one teacher often teaches in total four or five courses in two subjects and three grades.

Technical education and vocational training are alternatives to academic secondary schools. The intermediate level mainly provides “formal training programs for those who completed grade 9 from the general education stream with a duration of three years in fully fledged

⁹ Negash and Tronvoll according to Gardell, C J, 2000. Dolda motiv bakom kriget mellan Eritrea och Etiopien in “Svenska Dagbladet” 001009, Stockholm, Sweden. Some interviews I made also support this.

¹⁰ Negash and Tronvoll according to Gardell, C J, 2000. Dolda motiv bakom kriget mellan Eritrea och Etiopien in “Svenska Dagbladet” 001009, Stockholm, Sweden.

technical schools... Its main objective is supplying skilled manpower mainly to the modern manufacturing, construction and agriculture sector"¹¹ The main specialties are machine technology, electricity and auto-mechanics. There is no training for jobs like assistant nurse, basic secretary skills and childcare. This means that there is no vocational training for traditional women's work. Very few students get the opportunity to go to technical education or vocational training. 1999/2000 only 335 students graduated from the intermediate level¹². This should be compared to 6155 students in grade 11. There are plans within the Ministry of Education to expand the technical and vocational education.

Related to this are the streams in secondary schools. There are two academic streams, arts and science. These streams prepare the students for further studies. At some Comprehensive Secondary schools there are practical streams, but these are few. So all in all one can say that there are too few work related practical studies with relevance to the labor market needs.

3.2 Positive statistics

The development since the de facto independence 1991 is impressive. Gross enrolment ratios and the number of schools and teachers are growing. Some changes from 1991/1992 to 1999/2000 are:

The gross enrolment ratio rose from 36 (34 female) % to 58 (52) % for elementary school. From 20 (20) % to 43 (40) % for middle school and from 12 (12) % to 21 (16) % for secondary school.¹³ Both female and male enrolment is increasing, but the female rate is growing slower. For elementary school the male enrolment ratio is around 64 % compared to 52 % for girls.

The fact that the gross enrolment ratio for secondary school 1999/2000 was 21 % does not mean that 21 % of the children age 14 to 17 are in secondary school. Some of the students in secondary school are older repeaters and some of the children in that age group are in middle school or even in elementary school. But the gross enrolment ratio is an indicator.

The total number of schools has risen from 471 to 730.

¹¹ Ministry of Education, 2000. Eritrea: Educational Brief 1999/2000, p 9

¹² Ministry of Education, 2000. Eritrea: Educational Brief 1999/2000, p 10

¹³ Ministry of Education, 2000. Eritrea: Educational Brief 1999/2000 and Ministry of Education, 2000. Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators 1999/2000, p 22

3.3 Negative statistics

The development is very positive, but three areas to get worried about are the differences between Zobas, high drop out and repetition rates, and rising pupil per teacher ratios.

The difference in gross enrolment ratio between different Zobas is extreme. For Deb-Keih-Bahri the numbers for elementary, middle and secondary school are 12 %, 8 % and 3 %! For Sem-Keih-Bahri the numbers are 31 %, 17 % and 5 %.

For elementary level the withdrawal (drop out) rate is 13 % and the repetition rate 15 %. For middle it is 18 % and 20 %. For secondary it is 21 % and 19 %. This results in a large number of students not completing their studies. The gross enrolment ratio in grade 11 is only 10 %.¹⁴

Since the population growth during this period has been approximately 24 %¹⁵ the 66 % rise in the number of teachers means a 34 % rise in the number of teachers per capita.¹⁶ This has not been enough to keep the pupil per teacher ratio constant since the number of students has grown faster, so the pupil per teacher ratio has risen from 40 to 50. This problem is extra large in secondary school, where the number of teachers only rose by 38 %. So the pupil/teacher ratio went from 36 to 55 in secondary school.

To get a rough picture of the need for more teachers one can look at the situation in the primary schools (grade 1-7). The population in the age group 7-13 was 687 000 children year 2000. In 15 years from today, that is year 2017, it will be approximately 1 040 000 children. If we have the ambition that 80 % of them will be in school, that the pupil/teacher ratio will be 40 (today it is 49) and that each teacher will teach 25 lessons a week instead of today's 30, 25.000 teachers are needed, that is 17.500 more than today. This tells us that on average 1160 new teachers must be trained per year, and this is without covering for those who leave the profession. The last 8 years, the number of teachers in primary schools have risen from 4430 to 7541, on average 390 per year. 1999/2000 a total of 562 teachers graduated from ATTI¹⁷. To quickly more than double the capacity of ATTI would be costly. But maybe it still would be the most efficient investment Eritrea can do. I do not know how many middle school teachers that graduate every year from AU¹⁸, but I guess that it is less than 100.

¹⁴ Ministry of Education, 2000. Eritrea: Basic Education statistics 1999/2000, p 65

¹⁵ Ministry of Education, 2000. Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators 1999/2000, p 7

¹⁶ Ministry of Education, 2000. Eritrea: Educational Brief 1999/2000, p 7

¹⁷ Asmera Teacher Training Institute

¹⁸ Asmara University

Also when it comes to secondary schools more teachers are needed, but it is very important to train teachers for the streams and vocational schools that need more teachers. Maybe more physics and history teachers are less important than teachers for the practical subjects.

3.4 Notable things

After finishing grade 11 every person must do their national service. One problem is that many students fail by purpose in the grade 10 exam. By doing this they have to repeat grade 10 and thereby postpone their national service by one year. This gives the result that a lot of students are just sitting in the classroom, not with the intention to learn anything, but just to stay out of the military service. Of course this creates various problems. I do not really know how big this problem is, but one student told me that 62 % of the students in her class did fail; most of them by purpose. One administrative person said that at most secondary schools around 40 % fail, even if they report only 20 %. So maybe at most schools, around 30 % fail after grade 8 and 9, and 60 % after grade 10.

One very big problem is that very few of the secondary school teacher students want to become teachers. I talked to several teacher students and teachers at Asmara University, everybody confirmed this. The reason is partly that teachers are having a heavy load and are getting low salaries and have to work in the rural areas. But the problem is also that the profession has low status per se.

Elementary school used to be organized with subject teachers, but it is now changing to class teachers. ATTI is training class teachers, that is teachers that are trained to teach all subjects. The positive side with this is that the teachers can be more close to the students if they have one class in several subjects, instead of one subject in several classes. The negative side is that the teachers will be less qualified in the different subjects. In most subjects the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. But when it comes to English I do not think so. To day the teachers' total training in English is 6 credits. It would be more efficient to train specialized English teachers who then would work parallel with the class teachers in elementary schools.

4 Aims and topic

4.1 Discussion about the topic

War is one of the main factors to explain poverty. In Eritrea this is obviously the case. Eritrea has experienced 30 years of war to gain independence and after that a new war against Ethiopia 1998-2000 where tens of thousands of people died. To be able to stay out of war and

keep stability is essential for any country. Stability effects development in many ways. The economy works better, more people want to invest and start new businesses if there is political stability. People can plan for the future and trust each other. All this depends on the ability to build long term deals, relationships and contracts. Stability makes democracy possible. How can we achieve political stability and democracy?

Robert Putnam¹⁹ points out civil society. Democracy works when people trust each other and when they trust the state. If people take part in the civil society, if they sing in the choir, read the papers, if they get together and organize themselves to solve a common problem, then *social capital* are developed. This *social capital* means that the citizens get trust for each other and in the long run also for the state. So you could say that democracy starts from the bottom.

Bo Rothstein²⁰ argues the other way around. The state and the civil servants have a key position. The necessary trust are developed if these civil servants are fair and not corrupt. The top must lead.

Obviously Putnam and Rothstein have partly different views, but you could also say that both have a point. People must practice cooperation and democracy, but of course the government must show a good example.

School in general is very important in this process, and Civics in particular. It partly gives “the top” an opportunity to take the lead, by propagating its case. But it also gives the citizens the tools to take part in society and build up the social capital.

4.2 Purpose and Description of the Topic

I am interested in Civics since it seems to be very important in the process of establishing democracy. The topic for my study is Civics, and the problem is how it can contribute to the democratic and economic development of Eritrea. Does the subject contribute in this direction today, and how can it be better?

This, of course, must be narrowed down to a couple of concrete and manageable questions. It should give results that are of use to schools and the Ministry of Education. Holme and Solvang say the problem should be “exciting, fruitful and simple”²¹. When my questions are narrowed down I have to admit they are not so exciting. One could say I have given priority to make them fruitful and simple. My purpose therefore can be described as:

¹⁹ Putnam, Robert, 1996. *Den fungerande demokratin*. Stockholm: Norstedts

²⁰ Rothstein, Bo, 2001. “Tillit kommer från ovan”, *Moderna tider* 131, 44-48

²¹ Holme, Idar Magne och Solvang, Bernt Krohn, 1997. *Forskningsmetodik.*, p 37

Firstly, I want to get a general picture of the introduction of Civics. This means to make a progress report with some statistics. Secondly, I want to focus on the experiences of the teachers so far. What lessons have they learnt? What is their opinion about the pros and cons so far? Do they feel that they have been properly prepared for the task? Thirdly, I want to focus on the didactical perspective. Which methods and techniques are the teachers using in Civics? And which are the students' opinions about these?

The ambition has been that this study will indicate how Civics is developing. To sum up experiences and lessons gained so far is a part of an evaluation process that is necessary for all countries that initiate changes in the education system. Hopefully, this study can be a contribution to an exchange between Eritrea and Sweden. Such an exchange, and other steps that the Ministry of Education takes, must be based on knowledge of the situation and the experiences of the teachers.

I hope that the report will be useful for the Ministry of education in their work with a new and adjusted syllabus, textbooks and guidelines for the teachers. Also you could take the conclusion from the report into account in the further education of teachers.

I also hope that the report will be useful in the schools. Especially the part of the report dealing with teachers' experiences and which didactic methods are used today can be helpful for the teaching of tomorrow. This part can give teachers inspiration and insights of different didactic methods. I assume that both good and bad examples will appear. This part could also be a start for an exchange between teachers from different schools. As a complement to the workshops that might be a part of the official further education of teachers, it often gives teachers support if they come together in small groups and share experiences and tips. For such a group my report could be a starting point.

5 Methods

5.1 Introduction

I spent two months in Eritrea during May to July 2002. I visited Secondary Schools, the Faculty of Education at Asmara University, Asmara Teachers' Training Institute, the Eritrean Teachers' Association, and the Department of General Education. I tried to meet students, teachers and principals from different sectors of the country, in respect to geography and socio-economic background. I can not say I was successful in this, but I tried. I visited five schools from two of the six Zobas. I spoke mostly to men. But they were of different ages.

The Department of General Education was my number one source of information. They showed me all the written materials. I made copies of most of it. I also had a lot of conversations with helpful people there. I made interviews with five civil servants.

Through Eritrean Teachers' Association I got into contact with a lot of schools. When visiting a school I usually attended one or two or more classes with one teacher. After that I interviewed him or her. I did this with two or three teachers at most schools. After that I interviewed a school leader. I also got into contact with some teachers and students through informal contact such as the staff at my hotel. I spent one week at Asmara University and one day at Asmara Teachers Training Institute. My supervisor in Sweden gave me contacts at these places.

5.2 Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, principals, University teachers, teacher students and civil servants. I used a tape recorder once, but found that it felt more comfortable without it. I did not stick close to the interview guide, but at the end of each interview I checked if we had missed any questions. Many times I accepted that some questions did not come up. I tried to be sensitive. If the person did not have time or did not feel comfortable, then I did not ask some questions. Our conversations always started with me asking about the class I just had attended. So we talked about the situation for the teacher in the classroom. Most of my interviews were very informal, I didn't use the word "interview". Instead we just "talked". I tried to meet everybody twice. That is good because often something new comes up. The interviews were a very good way to find out what the teachers' opinions are. In total I interviewed 13 teachers from five Secondary Schools and one middle school. I attended 14 classes at four Secondary Schools. I interviewed five students from two Secondary Schools, one Middle and one Elementary School. I interviewed head masters at three schools. I interviewed six teachers and four teacher students at Asmara University and ATTI.

5.3 Observations

I made open observations in a total of 14 classes in secondary schools and one at Asmara University. I just sat at a desk in a corner listening and watching. The observations gave a chance to find out what methodology the teachers are using. I could also observe which topics are given priority to. You could say that the classroom is the place where I could see if all information I got from interviews and documents were "true". Of course the situation in the

classrooms become different when I am there, but I still felt that I got a picture of the Eritrean school.

5.4 Studies of documents

I studied textbooks, teacher's guides for textbooks and syllabus. I also studied statistics from the Ministry of Education.

6 Progress report for Civics

6.1 Start

In the curriculum designed during the struggle for national liberation of the E.P.L.F, Moral and Civic Education were not treated as separate subjects in the school program. Instead the moral concepts and their applications were integrated with the different subjects. But a subject called "Political Education" existed. 1977-81 it was given from grade one. 1982-1988 it was given from grade 3. Political Education was very much influenced by socialism. "Program of grade seven: Discussion about classes in Eritrean society, the program of EPLF; People's War; Cultural Revolution; the role of society in the revolution (armed struggle); Unity and its importance in the national democratic revolution; revolutionary discipline and anti-revolution tendencies; contradictions and their solutions; Ethiopia... etc."²²

Taking into consideration past experiences, some steps were taken in 1989: It was decided to drop political education in primary school. It should be substituted by civics in middle and secondary schools. Civics should not be above the ability of students.

During a couple of years, about 1996 to 1998 the churches were running some kind of moral education in Eritrean schools. This is not mentioned in the documents I have studied, but I know it was the case. Unfortunately, I do not have more information about this.

In 1993, there was a national congress where the syllabus for Moral and Civic Education was presented and approved. Thereafter, textbooks and teachers' guides for most of the textbooks were produced. 1998 civics was introduced. The situation to day is that in Zoba Maakel Civics is taught, but in Zoba Anseba it is not. I do not know about the other four Zobas. I asked one official at the Department of General Education and he did not know whether Civics is taught outside Zoba Maakel or not.

²² Department of Education, Curriculum Development and Research institute, 1992. Moral and civic education in the Eritrean curriculum (Draft), p 5

6.2 Why?

Two didactic questions are “what is taught?” respectively “why is it taught?”. To find out what is supposed to be taught, I studied the textbooks. To find out the official answer to the question why it is taught, I studied ‘aims and objectives’ in the syllabus.

Civics is a part of ‘Moral and Civic Education’, and the aims of Civics are very much about ‘creating a better citizen’ for the good of the nation. One civil servant said, “by civics we mean citizenship education” and he said the aim is to teach good citizens. In the syllabus it says “Aims and objectives of moral and civic education in the Eritrean educational system are seen in terms of the strengthening of national unity and identity among citizens; national reconstruction, and the raising of the citizens moral standards.”²³ It also says “...our educational system should enable us to create citizens imbued with desirable morality and who can shoulder civic responsibility.”²⁴ The desirable morality is about nationalism and patriotism; it is about national reconstruction (as I understand it).

The Swedish curriculum for “Samhällskunskap” (Knowledge about the Society) that has the same role as Civics, has similarities and differences.²⁵ In both countries the ambition is to raise the moral standards. But in Sweden the desired moral is about ‘understanding of the multicultural society’, ‘reflect over co-operation and conflicts in international relations’ and ‘ecological sustainability’. The Eritrean curriculum focuses on duties and rights towards Eritrea. The Swedish curriculum focuses to larger extent on ‘understanding of different perspectives and ideologies’, ‘critically study social issues’ and ‘ability to ask questions, argue and express an attitude/standpoint’. You could say that the Swedish curriculum is more individualistic. This is shown for example when it comes to the issues about taxes. In the Eritrean textbook it is facts about how it works in Eritrea today. In the Swedish textbook tax is connected to ideologies and different perspectives are presented.

6.3 What?

So, what is taught? The three main areas are:

1. Eritrean politics and administration.
2. Eritrean issues such as: Unions, social services, education, transportation etc.

²³ Department of Education, Curriculum Development and Research institute, 1992. Moral and civic education in the Eritrean curriculum (Draft), p 13

²⁴ Department of Education, Curriculum Development and Research institute, 1992. Moral and civic education in the Eritrean curriculum (Draft), p 7

²⁵ Skolverket, Kursplan, 2002. Samhällskunskap for gymnasieskolan

3. World political system.

Two notable differences from Sweden are that Eritrean civics is mainly focused on Eritrea, and does not include economics and mass media. The students' opinions about the content seem to be that it is too little about other countries and too much about the struggle and history. But when I asked the teachers what their impression of the students' interest is, they had another picture. They said the students liked issues like health, education and transport best. However, it seems clear that the students do not find "politics" interesting. It is important to ask one self why this is the case.

6.4 Teachers Training

When Civics was introduced, the teachers received very little training. 35 teachers took part in a workshop for one week, that is all. This workshop was about Civics methodology, not about subject matters. Therefore, no teachers are qualified to teach Civics, and no "Civics-teachers" exist. Also notable is that no Civics teachers are being trained, and there are no plans to start train any. Asmara University and ATTI argue that they have to give priority to other subjects. The Department of General Education argues that it is about lack of communication.

6.5 Organization

In the curriculum it says that Civics should have one period a week, but at all schools I have heard of they are using two periods a week. I do not think this is on the initiative of the Ministry of Education. Civics is basically organized in two different ways. Firstly, in most schools the teachers teaching Civics are feeling almost completely unprepared. In these schools, the homeroom teachers are told to teach Civics to some extent. Yet in some cases a couple of teachers are appointed, but these are not chosen because they have better interest or knowledge. This was the case in three of five schools. Secondly, in some schools a smaller group of teachers that are specially interested, teach Civics. This was the case in one school. Finally, at one school it was some where between.

The schools just got textbooks for the teachers and it is too expensive to make copies. This results in that much time for the students in class is spent copying from the black board. I actually met one teacher who told all students to make copies of the textbook. Some students made copies by hand, and other used a photocopier. All Civics teachers do have the textbook, but not all of them have the teacher's guide. Also in other subjects than Civics there is a shortage of books to some extent. At one school outside Asmara, I was told that there is a

shortage of books, so not all students can buy the book. This might be more common, even if people do not tell me about it.

6.6 Notable

Civics is not included in the matriculation exam, also called Eritrean Secondary Education Certificate Examination (ESECE). It is neither included in entrance exams to grade 8. This creates problem since the students do not study hard in Civics when they know that they do not need it to be accepted to the University. This fact also works as a signal from the Ministry of Education to teachers and students that Civics is not important. The same can be said when it comes to the fact that no books are available.

I have indications that the teachers tend to make the exams in Civics simple. One school told me that less than 10 % fail in Civics and I have seen some exams and they are not too complicated. Unfortunately, I have not seen the exams in history as a reference. Nevertheless, no one has talked about students failing in Civics as a problem.

The teachers think that female students and male students show the same interest in the subject. My impressions from attending classes is that boys show a little more interest, a rough estimation is that 60 % of the questions come from boys. My guess is that this is about the same as in other subjects.

7 Teachers' and principals' opinions and lessons learned

I got a very large number of interesting viewpoints from teachers, students and principals. I have listed a lot of them in the appendix. These “Voices from teachers, students and principals” can be a starting point for a seminar or for a discussion. I have also included some of my own reflections.

The most critical thing that influences the possibilities for teachers to do a good job is the lack of preparations. The teachers teaching Civics are not prepared for the task. A few have got a one week days workshop in Civics methodology, but they have not got any training in Civics itself. They feel that they miss both training in Civics methodology and ‘subject matter’. One teacher told me that “I don’t feel confident in class, I might get a question I can’t answer.” I think this uncomfortable feeling is representative for most Civics teachers, at least for those that are not History teachers. And at many schools the teachers are teaching Civics additional to their ordinary subject. Therefore, they do not have time to prepare the lessons in Civics.

In some schools a small group of teachers that want to teach Civics and that have knowledge and training in a closely related subject, often history, are assigned to teach Civics. They just teach Civics, so they have time to prepare the lessons and since they have a genuine interest in the subject they teach with passion. This management obviously works better. But it is often impossible to let a history teacher teach Civics 100 %, since all history teachers must teach history. Then it is most handy to let the homeroom teacher teach Civics.

Another thing that came up in many conversations is that many students' English is weak. The teachers are using the mother tongue as medium of instruction a lot. I have indications that it is as much as half the period, but I also have indications that it just is 3 minutes per period. Most teachers' opinion is that this could be tolerated. But when using English it is very difficult for the student to be active since they have such difficulties in expressing themselves in English. And even when you use teacher centered learning the language is a problem. It is difficult for the teacher to express complicated ideas in a way that the students understand in a foreign language. The teachers see English as medium of instruction as a major obstacle in Civics classes. But strangely, most of them still support that Eritrea is using English as the medium of instruction.

Many teachers' opinion is that what is most needed is more periods and textbooks. Teachers feel that they do not have enough time to go through to textbook. Especially Civics for grade eleven is too extensive. The lack of textbooks is obviously a problem.

Last but not least many teachers feel uncertain about the aims and objectives for Civics. They simply do not know why they teach it.

8 Methodology

In "Voices from teachers, students and principals" you can find several example of how teachers are working.

The Department of General Education has a clear vision of what methodology that should be used in Civics. The teachers' guide is supposed to be a help for the teacher when using the methodology. The workshop held by the Department of General Education was also an opportunity for the officials to communicate their vision²⁶.

The idea is that the teachers should use a student-centered technique. That is what is recommended according to *social constructivism*.²⁷ "The aim is to have instruction based on

²⁶ Ministry of education, the department of general education, history panel, 1997? Workshop on civics grades 9-

²⁷ Conversation with Johan Nelson, Malmö University, School of Teacher Education

the active participation of the student. To this effect the lesson should start with activities focusing on inquiry and discovery. The teacher should: Manage the student activities and facilitate learning on the basis of the hand on' approach. Regulate and stabilize the proceedings. Conclude the proceedings by providing basic information (Key information).”²⁸ These “activities” can be exemplified by “Organize the students in groups. Assign each group one of the following questions: 1. Identify the basic activities of local government. 2. Discuss the benefits of local government. Have the students report their work in class. Conduct a discussion on the basis of the reports. Summarize the main points and link them with the teacher’s input (Key information). Communicate the key information through an illustrated explanation.”²⁹ Each chapter in the book ends with some control questions called “exercise”.

The teachers usually do not use the “activities” the way suggested by the teacher’s guide and the textbook. During a typical lesson the teacher first gives the “key information”, and after that the teacher usually uses both the exercise questions and the activity as exercise or control questions. But few (none?) teachers use the activity as a way to take a start in the students’ experiences, or to “focus on inquiry and discovery”. And no teachers divide the students into “assigned” groups. Several teachers mentioned lack of reference material as a problem obstructing them from using activities. This indicates that many teachers misunderstand the idea from the textbook since reference material is not needed.

In most classes the students answered the teacher in one voice, or like an anonymous voice. I rarely saw a teacher speak to one specific student. And I do not think I ever saw a teacher use a student’s name. The teachers ask the students to participate, but they do not insist. This seems to contradict the fact that the students have great respect for the teachers and would do whatever the teacher asks them to do. So if the teacher simple would demand the students to give their opinion and to take part in discussions, they would do that, I think.

When I talked to teachers and when I made classroom observations, I got the impression that many teachers feel that they are supposed to use student-centered techniques. Therefore they try this even if the conditions are not fulfilled in terms of, for example, class size, access to rooms and the teachers qualifications. In many cases they do not succeed and the teacher feels like a failure. Many teachers have a bad conscience about using traditional teaching. To some extent maybe they do not worry too much about it in the every day work, but when I came as a visitor the issue came up.

²⁸ Ministry of education, the department of general education, 1997. Teacher’s guide civics grade ten, p 2

²⁹ Ministry of education, the department of general education, 1997. Teacher’s guide civics grade ten, p 2

I experienced many good lectures. No doubt many teachers are skilled and talented lecturers. Some teachers combined the traditional teaching style and student-centered teaching. Let me give you a couple of examples:

I asked one teacher how come he has such a good contact with the students. He said he is their friend. “When I pass them I beat them playfully”. Therefore they are not afraid to ask him questions.

One teacher was very free and spontaneous. He said he does not follow the book so closely, because “I know what is best for the students”.

One teacher puts it like this: “Ask the student questions! It is very important to have questions at their level, not bombastic questions. This should not be Yes or No questions, but “open” questions.”

One teacher was very satisfied only teaching in one grade and one subject. “Then you even have time to prepare jokes!”

An inspiring episode:

When he gives them an open question “How did the Dergue differ from other colonization?” two students give long answers. He really encourages them and he says “Good!” He gave them an activity that he made up himself, it is not from the text book: “What would you do if you were a 10th grade student in the Dergue time?”. Since they did not have that much time, just a couple of minutes, he let them raise their hands and categorized their answers into four categories. Join EPLF (5 students), Help grade 1-6 (4 students), Nothing (2 students) and Self-help (3 students). After that he gave them a question as homework: “How can colonialism be justified?” He tells them that they can answer in Tigrinya if they like. His last words are “Thank you for your silence and attention” My impression is that the students feel comfortable with him, and therefore dare to speak.

9 Discussion

9.1 General discussion

This is not specifically related to Civics, but it is such an important issue that I will mention it anyhow. Very few students go to practical streams or technical schools or vocational training. The vast majority of those in that age group that go to school go to academic streams. I do not think that this fits the coming needs of the society.

The capacity to train new teachers must be more than doubled if Eritrea should reach a satisfactory level within 15 years from now. The training of the middle and secondary school teachers at Asmara University must be more focused on practical pedagogy and methodology.

Today the student teachers do not take any course in subject methodology at all³⁰. It is the ambition of the staff at the Faculty of Education at Asmara University to make changes in this direction.

The repetition system is a big problem. A large number of the students in a classroom in Eritrea are repeaters. This results in larger classes and thereby a more difficult task for the teachers.

9.2 Discussion about Civics

The students I spoke to think that Civics is too close to History. They also think that it is too much about the struggle and too much about Eritrea. They wish it were more about the situation in other countries.

The most important thing that influences the possibility to teach Civics (and other subjects) might be that English is used as medium of instruction. It is an obstacle in several ways. First, the students are having difficulties understanding what the teacher is saying. Second, the teachers are having difficulties explaining complicated things. Third, it is very hard to have a discussion in English in a subject like Moral and Civic Education. I think that Civics is the subject that suffers most from English being the medium of instruction.

The most common arguments and counter-arguments for using English as medium of instruction are

1. It is a way to improve the students' skills in the English language. I think that there are better ways to improve the students English. And even if they get a bit better in English that is outweighed by the disadvantage that the other subjects suffer.
2. It is expensive to translate the textbooks to all the mother tongues. Even in the cases when the books are in English you could use the mother tongue as medium of instruction. It is organized like that at the Universities in Sweden for example.
3. There are not enough teachers trained in the eight mother tongues except Tigrinya. And when using English as medium of instruction it is possible to use teachers from abroad to fill gaps. The year 1999/2000 of the total 2359 teachers in secondary and middle schools³¹ there were 318 expatriate teachers, mostly Indians, deployed³² This does not stop the

³⁰ University of Asmara, faculty of education, social science education unite, 2002. Revised curriculum for bachelor degree in English, geography and history

³¹ Ministry of Education, 2000. Eritrea: Essential Education Indicators 1999/2000, p 9

³² Ministry of Education, 2000. Eritrea: Educational Brief 1999/2000, p 8

teachers that actually have the same mother tongue as the students from using the mother tongue.

4. Using one single language as medium of instruction promotes national unity. But if using one of the local languages, let us say Tigrinya, this could create tensions. English is a neutral language. This is a heavy argument.
5. The mother tongues are not developed enough, this means that it is not possible to discuss for example mathematics or politics in those languages. When using a language it develops. The needed words will be adopted from English.
6. Historical reasons. English has been the medium of instruction since the 1940ies. Maybe it is time to change?

A change might come, since it is the ambition of the Ministry of Education to use mother tongue as medium of instruction as soon as possible. But as long as English is used it is important to make the students as good in English as possible. And even if the medium of instruction is changed of course English is a very important subject. The class teachers to come in elementary schools will have a total of six credits in English. That is not enough. I think it should be considered to use subject teachers in elementary schools when it comes to English. VSO teachers and Peace Corps volunteers is a very efficient supplement to fully-trained teachers. This should not be gap-filling, but just a chance for the students to speak more English and to listen to a native speaking person.

If I am right when I think that Civics is not taught in Zoba Anseba this indicates that maybe there is no Civics in the other four Zobas (except Zoba Maakel) either. It is natural that it takes some time to introduce a reform, but still it is important to be aware of the progress.

As long as no priorities are given to Civics in terms of textbooks for the students and education for the teachers it will be a big problem that students and teachers feel that Civics is not as important as other subjects are. There are plans to rearrange the social science sector. This could mean that Civics, History and Geography will be united into one subject. So one reason for not producing textbooks and educating any Civics teachers can be that Civics is not supposed to live long. But, anyhow, as long as Civics is in the curriculum, of course it should be organized in an efficient way. Those schools that let the homeroom teacher teach Civics are giving the teacher a hard time. It is desirable to appoint a group of teachers that just teach Civics. Then these teachers have the possibility to specialize themselves.

9.3 Further research

In-depth interviews with a number of Civics teachers no doubt would give more understanding of their experiences and thoughts. When developing the Eritrean school system, one of the most important inputs must come from the teachers.

Even if Civics in Secondary School is the topic it would be fruitful to study History and Middle School to get a wider perspective. It is also important to get a picture of all Zobas, not only Zoba Maakel.

The medium of instruction must be analyzed more. The country-specific circumstances such as the number of qualified teachers with different mother tongues, and ethnic aspects, etc must be considered. But also essential is to look at this as a universal dilemma. How should you handle the language question in multi-lingual societies?

10. References

10.1. Interviews and attended classes

Six secondary schools, two middle schools and one elementary school in two zobas:

Interviewed:

13 teachers at 5 secondary schools and one middle school.

School leaders at three schools.

Five students from four schools.

Attended 14 classes at four schools.

Asmara University

Interviewed:

Five teachers

Four student teachers

Attended one class

Asmara Teachers Training Institute.

Interviewed one teacher

Attended one class

Ministry of Education and Department of General Education

Interviewed five civil servants

Eritrean Teachers' association

Interview one active member

10.2. Literature

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11. Appendices

11.1 Interview guide.

To officials

1. What's your name? Role/job/position? Now and previously.
2. What parts in the aims and objectives of Civics do you find most important?
3. Are the secondary schools reaching these aims? Why/why not?
4. Do you think the textbook/the content/the topics are fit to the aims?
5. What support when it comes to methodology etc do the teachers need? Will they get it?
6. What are the rules and traditions for examination and marks?
7. Language? ESECE (Eritrean Secondary Education Certificate Examination)?
8. Do you have plans for more practical streams in secondary school? Secretary assistant? Dresser? Assistant nurse? Child minder (kindergarten)? Tailor? Cook?
9. Most schools use 2 periods per week, but it should be only one. How come?
10. Do you think the teacher can figure out the aims and objectives from the textbook, or should the workshops be about aims and objectives?

To the Faculty of Education

1. Where can I find statistics about enrollment, failure and pass; for different grades, ages, gender, and regions?
2. Which courses are included in the Civics teacher program?
3. Tell me about the teachers training. Which methodologies are the teachers students prepared to use when they graduate?
4. Do you think they will actually use these methods in class? What might hinder them?
5. What methodologies are you using when teaching the teachers students?

To the school:

1. How is Civics organized? Do the homeroom teachers teach?
2. How many students? Classes? Streams? Teachers? Foreign teachers? Male/female.
3. Drop out rate? Failure rate?
4. Where do the students live? How far from school? What do their parents do for a living?
5. What do you think of English as a medium of instruction? Pros and cons? Is it the only possible way?
6. What do you think should be done to improve education and learning in schools?

To teachers:

1. What's your name, what subjects do you teach, how many classes?
2. How were you prepared to teach Civics?
3. Tell me about how you work in the classroom, and what you think is most important when teaching.
4. Which methods and techniques do you recommend other teachers to use? What should a teacher keep in mind?
5. What do the students think about Civics?

6. Which methodologies and topics do they like best/least?
7. What do you think about the textbook?
8. Have you seen the teacher's guide and the syllabus?
9. Is it possible to use the "activities"? Is it possible to teach the way you would like to teach? Why/why not?
10. Do you think there are any topics missing/too much in Civics grade 9-11?
11. What is your general picture so far, pros and cons in Civics?
12. How often do you use Tigrinya? Would it be easier to teach in Tigrinya? Any disadvantages? Is English the only possible way?
13. Are there any differences between boys and girls?
14. What kind of exams and tests do you use? What marks can the students get?
15. What do you think the teacher can do to make the students talk more freely? Not to be so shy and silent and afraid?
16. Does the content match the aims/objectives? (These attitudes and values: Self-reliance, tolerance, responsibility, patriotism, fortitude, cultural awareness, community concern, transparency accountability)
17. Do the students make copies of the textbook?
18. Do you think some teachers, sometimes/often use Civics periods to teach another subject?

To student teachers

1. Name, age, region?
2. What do you think about Asmara University in general? The teacher training?
3. What do you think about the teachers? What methodologies are they using?
4. What's your training in English?
5. Why do you want to be a teacher in Civics?
6. Hobbies? Sport? TV?
7. Are you interested in politics? Social issues? What newspaper do you read?
8. What is the most significant thing you have learnt here?
9. Do you feel well prepared?
10. What in the textbook/extent/topics is good? Could be changed?
11. What about the aims and objectives?

To students

1. Name, grade, age, school? Brothers, sisters?
2. Do you like school? Do you study every day at home? Two hours/day?
3. Favorite subject?
4. Favorite teacher? Why do you like him/her?
5. What do you want to become when you grow up? Dream job?
6. Hobbies? Sport? TV? Books?
7. What do you think about Civics? Fun? Interesting? Important?
8. Tell me about a typical lesson in Civics! (Other subjects?)
9. How do you think a teacher should be? How do you want him to teach? Treat students?

10. If you could give advice to Civics teachers, what would you say?
11. Do you get a lot of homework in Civics? What kind of homework?
12. How often do the teachers hit students? Speak Tigrinya?
13. Have you ever made your teacher really angry/happy? What happened?

11.2 Voices from teachers, students and principals:

A, B, C... represents different persons. Y means yes and N means no.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J, K	Me
<i>Teachers' opinions</i>											
Teachers are not prepared to teach Civics. "I was not prepared at all, I just got the textbook and was told to teach."		Y						Y	Y		
So, why does he have such a good contact with the students? He is their friend. "When I pass them I beat them playfully". Therefore they are not afraid to ask him questions.		Y									
Sometimes he explains in Tigrinya. That seems to be accepted among the teachers. He uses Tigrinya when it is really important. "Let them use Tigrinya, language is not a goal in it self, it is Civics that is important."		Y		Y	Y						
So, what is needed? More periods and text books to the students!											
He has attended one workshop about how to teach Civics, but he would need to know about the subject. He needs knowledge. Even as a history teacher you lack knowledge about political science.			Y		Y	Y	Y				
In the beginning the students did not like Civics, because they could not see the point.				Y							
When he teaches he does not follow the book so closely, because "I know what is best for the students".				Y							
What is most important in teaching? Student participation, competition can be one way.				Y							
One teacher's tips: Teaching the students to summarize their notes, and to identify the key points. Relate to the					Y						

real world. The students must understand why this is important.																				
Ask the student questions! It is very important to have questions at their level, not bombastic questions. This should not be Yes or No questions, but “open” questions.					Y															
You should have frequent tests, right after the topic. The test is also a chance to learn.					Y															
“We teachers sometimes want to teach too much. Instead we should focus on the most important things.”					Y															
You can’t make study visits, because the students would destroy things.					Y															
They both see it as a problem that many teachers have two subjects to teach. A teacher should only teach in one grade. The you even has time to prepare jokes!	Y							Y	Y											
He does not feel confident in class, he might get a question he can not answer. The students have low expectations on him.												Y								
We say to each other that the economic views are few in topics as health. Tax is economics, but unemployment and inflation etc is neglected in the textbook.														Y						
He puts the whole textbook on the black board, ‘cause they are two teachers, and what if they did summarize different?!								N					Y							
The students are not interested, and he is not interested. The homeroom teachers don’t even like the subject them self.					Y							Y	Y							
He has never seen the syllabus.												Y	Y							
<i>Some examples</i>																				
They have 2 periods a week. One period he teaches the facts, one he has discussion.		Y																		
When he gives them an open question “How did the					Y															

Dergue differ from other colonization?" actually two students give answers with 5-10 sentences. He really encourages them and he says "Good!" His last words are "Thank you for you silence and attention" My impression is that the students feel comfortable him, and therefore dare to speak.										
Says "You know the Ethiopian embassy, perhaps when you grow up you wont allow schools to become embassies." He is very engaged and offers to bring his old Ethiopian ID-card some time. Then he comes to the Dergue period. He tries to connect to the students by asking "the Dergue shot down Expo school, any student from Expo?"			Y							
He was spontaneous and referred to Sweden, "Communication is for example if you make a phone call to Sweden". Then the students laughed.		Y								
A student comes up with an interesting question: If everybody were fighting, who were teaching? This is based in his own thinking! How do we get more students to be creative?					Y					
Then he gave them an activity that he made up himself, it is not from the text book: "What would you do if you were a 10 th grade student in the Dergue time?". They don't have so much time, just a couple of minutes, so he <i>categorizes their answers</i> into 4 categories and the rise their hands. Join EPLF (5 students), Help grade 1-6 (4 students), Nothing and Selfhelp. An activity: "How can colonialism be justified?" He tells them that <i>they can answer in Tigrinya</i> if they like.			Y							
<i>Mine and students' analysis</i>										
A student that also went to a foreign school: "The students never discuss the way she has experienced in the foreign school. The students' opinions are never asked for in any subjects. "									Y/?	
They never address one student; "Mahari, what is you opinion?"										

The students never talk to each other. I haven't seen that even ones in Eritrea. The students never have a discussion with each other or respond to what another student said. The students always talk to the teacher.										
He really checks that they have understood, and that is important. But they never have opinions or proposals to solutions. "Tell me about the administration!" Silence. "How many Zobas do we have?" they answer six in one voice. One interesting thing is, that the teacher "is allowed to" punish, and they have to obey him when he asks them to clear out the black board, but he never give them an order: "You have to try to answer!"				Y						
I think that it is important that the teachers use the techniques he feels comfortable using. You shouldn't force the teachers to use modern techniques if they don't like it.										
I got the impression that he thinks that we have wonderful perfect lessons in west. This is not true, teachers are facing problems when using student centered lessons both in Sweden and Eritrea.				Y						
No teacher talking about tax has so far said anything about that different countries have different tax levels. That tax is a left-right question. It is mostly about Eritrea.										
One thing is that he asks them to discuss something that is very boring. Even in Sweden he students often are quite because they actually don't have any interest or opinion. Maybe these students are not trained from home and culture to discuss politics, so how could they? It's like many girls in Sweden.				Y						
The students are afraid of getting hit by the teacher.									Y	
The teacher says, "now you will be active" instead of just let it happen, when it comes naturally. They are not trained.				Y						
Me. Has strict discipline, but still the students ask a lot. Is here a contradiction?					Y					

To what extent shall the students learn facts by hart? They can look it up in a reference book when they need it. But what if they don't own any books?						Y						
<i>More examples</i>												
He collect all note books every second month, and checks so they have taken all the notes. If they do not have taken all the notes they do not get their marks.		Y								Y		
Me. has forced the students to make a copy of the textbook (which must cost 10-15 Nakfa at least)						Y						
He asks "any questions?" and no student has any questions. One single student talks alone ones, otherwise they always speak in a quire. And then they give one-word answers.	Y											
He speaks Tigrinya 3-4 times.	Y											
When one girl rose to tell what "class" means he said in a (that sounded to me) hard way: No, I didn't say like that. But she tried to answer another question later on, so he didn't scare her away.	Y											
He uses the question method. But he puts very leading questions.	Y											
The students are quiet and they are looking at him, I think the are listening.	Y				Y							
He explains well, he is a skilled pedagogue giving a lecture. And it is to some extent interactive.	Y				Y							
I think the students like their teacher.	Y	Y		Y	Y							
He followed the textbook very close.	Y	Y	Y									
Is a refrigerator luxury? They answer "Yes", is it really? They answer "No" as one man. He just tells them the correct answer.			Y									
He does not uses the "activity" at all.	Y			N!								

He explains the text on the black board, sentence by sentence.				Y								
<i>This is what schools do, and opinions</i>												
For one year the homeroom teachers were teaching Civics, but they changed it so those teachers that are teaching, or have a degree in, a related subject are now teaching Civics.				Y	Y							
They made this change after giving a questionnaire to the student.				Y	Y							
Now civics and history are the same department and the subjects enrich each other.				Y	Y							
Some teachers, in for example maths or physics, use the Civics periods for there own subject.						Y	Y	Y				
Some persons tell me that some of the teachers don't always show up to classes.												
<i>The students</i>												
The topics that the students find most interesting are Social service, Health, Education, Transport etc. The issue of women etc are not interesting.		Y		Y								
One reason that they don't care about Civics is that it's not in the ESECE.		Y	Y					Y				
Boys and girls show the same interest in the subject.		Y										
The students find it too much the same as history, especially in grade 11.								Y				