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Literacy Studies without Boundaries: A Different look at International Studies

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Literacy Studies without Boundaries: A Different look at International Studies^{5,6}

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PISA 2000, PISA 2003, PIRLS 2001, PIRLS 2006 – we are faced with a growing number of large-scale international studies providing us with a rich body of information about levels of reading competence and factors related to reading achievement in various countries.

Why do we need these studies? We are told: PIRLS is “designed to provide policy makers, educators, researchers, and practitioners with information about educational achievement and learning contexts” (Mullis et al. 2003, 3). Likewise a central aim of PISA is to enable countries to monitor their educational performance and offer information to judge the comparative effectiveness of the education systems.

These data have been analysed, re-analysed and meta-analysed for information about the efficiency of national educational systems, as a basis for political decisions. You get the impression that these data are produced for institutions and adults. In this presentation I have chosen to take a different look at them: from the perspective of children and their rights, with the aim of answering the question: In what countries are children’s rights to literacy education most effectively upheld.

It is not very long ago in history of humankind that childhood was identified or even “invented” and that children were for the first time considered not as small adults but as individuals with specific needs, perceptions and thoughts – entitled to special care and assistance. Rousseau in 1762 in his book “*Emile*” made the famous statement “Childhood has its ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling that are proper to it” (para. 258) and need to be respected. Rousseau is regarded as one of the first people to claim that children have rights (or let’s specify boys have rights because Sophie, the girl in his book, was treated rather badly) and he was more a man of theory than of practice, since he consigned his own five illegitimate children to an orphanage.

More than 100 years ago Ellen Key’s book “*The Century of the Child*” was published, and in 1924 the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child stated the need to extend particular care to the child for reasons of physical and mental immaturity. In 1989 the United Nations declared the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 17 refers to the aim of these rights: the promotion of the child’s social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health. Article 28 in rather general terms refers to the rights of children on the basis of equal opportunity. More specific rights of children to literacy have been declared by the International Reading Association (2000) which have been adopted by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Lesen und Schreiben (*10 Rechte des Kindes auf Lesen und Schreiben*, www.dgls.de). The International Reading Association children’s rights are as follows:

1. Children have a right to appropriate early reading instruction based on their individual needs.
2. Children have a right to reading instruction that builds both the skill and the desire to read increasingly complex materials.
3. Children have a right to well-prepared teachers who keep their skills up to date through effective professional development.
4. Children have a right to access a wide variety of books and other reading material in classroom, school, and community libraries.

⁵ Keynote address

⁶ Notice: The power point slides of this presentation may be downloaded from the website of the German Association of Reading and Writing (www.dgls.de).

I am very grateful to Henrietta Dombey for polishing my English.

5. Children have the right to reading assessment that identifies their strengths as well as their needs and involves them in making decisions about their own learning.
6. Children who are struggling with reading have a right to receive intensive instruction from professionals specifically prepared to teach reading.
7. Children have a right to reading instruction that involves parents and communities in their academic lives.
8. Children have a right to reading instruction that makes skilled use of their first language skills.
9. Children have the right to equal access to the technology used for the improvement of reading instruction.
10. Children have a right to classrooms that optimize learning opportunities.

Source: International Reading Association (2000).

In this presentation I define some rights of children in terms adapted to the databases of PIRLS and PISA. The rights thus defined are both more general than IRA's 10 Rights of Children to Literacy and also more specific than the rights of children set out in the United Nations Convention. The Convention states that the child should "grow up in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding" in the family environment. Likewise one may claim that children should grow up in an atmosphere of respect, support and individual encouragement in school environments.

A good framework for defining more specific children's rights is offered by the UNESCO report written by the Delors Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century. The report states that education plays an important role in the attempt of humankind to attain the ideals of peace, freedom and social justice, and identifies four pillars as fundamental to education: *learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be* (Delors, 1998).

Based on these pillars I have outlined nine rights of education to literacy. They fall into three categories:

- "*Learning to know and learning to do*"
 - 1) Children have a right to parental support.
 - 2) Children have a right to attend preschool or kindergarten.
 - 3) Children have a right to favourable educational resources at school.
 - 4) Children have a right to appropriate instruction based on their individual needs.
 - 5) Children have a right to be supported by teachers.
 - 6) Children who are struggling with reading have a right to receive intensive instruction from professionals specifically trained to teach reading.
 - 7) Children have a right to equal educational opportunity, regardless of social class, gender and nationality.
- "*Learning to live together*"
 - 8) Children have a right to favourable conditions in school to learn to live together in peace and harmony.
- "*Learning to be*"
 - 9) Children have a right to learning environments that help them to develop positive self-related beliefs and confidence in their own learning abilities.

The procedure is as follows: For each right, possible indicators in the databases of the international studies were identified. PIRLS and PISA offer a rich body of information about factors related to reading achievement in various countries: pupil characteristics like reading habits, engagement, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES) as well as information about features of the learning environments at home and in school. In each case I will present the top three countries with the most favourable scores on the indicators. I admit the arbitrariness of selecting only the top three: other countries may not have significantly different scores from these.

Because this is a European conference, I will consider only European countries participating in PIRLS and PISA⁷. When looking at the results, three aspects should be kept in mind:

- Different countries participated in PIRLS and PISA, with only 13 countries participating in both studies (with United Kingdom in PISA, England and Scotland in PIRLS).
- We have different databases: In PISA students and school principals completed a questionnaire; in PIRLS students, parents, teachers and principals participated.
- The results from PIRLS and PISA are difficult to compare with each other: In PIRLS the student is always the unit of analysis: the figures presented in the International Report (Mullis et al., 2003) are the percentages of students to which a certain characteristic applies.

But PISA gives different kinds of information about results: percentages (sometimes embedded in graphic information and difficult to translate into numbers), scale values and sometimes also index values (with the average of zero and a standard deviation of one across OECD countries). Because percentage measures are clear and evident, only these figures will be presented.

One word of caution is necessary: The data are based on self reports rather than external observation and so there may be biases in the answers: teachers, parents and principals may answer according to the social desirability of certain responses. Answers may be influenced by cross-cultural differences in response behaviour (such as modesty), or there may be cultural differences in the meanings connected to certain features.

RESULTS CONCERNING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS: "LEARNING TO KNOW AND LEARNING TO DO"

Children have a right to favourable learning conditions at home and in school so that they are encouraged and supported in learning to know and learning to do. Here, some contexts of learning in home, preschool and school will be considered.

1) Children Have a Right to Parental support

The home is an essential context factor for children's reading literacy. Parents are important for fostering early language and literacy activities, providing literacy and cultural resources and activities and as literacy role models. Both PISA and PIRLS demonstrate that there is educational benefit in home-based access to literature and other cultural possessions. Involvement in literacy activities from an early age is a key element of the foundation of future literacy.

The PIRLS data base offers three indicators for parental support:

Index of early experiences with oral and printed language

PIRLS used an index of Early Home Literacy Activities based on parents' responses to the frequency of the following activities they engaged in with their child prior to entry in primary school: reading books, telling stories, singing songs, playing with alphabet toys (e.g., blocks with letters of the alphabet), playing word games or reading aloud signs or labels (Mullis et al., 2003, 97).

PIRLS showed a positive relationship between reading performance and parents' engagement in early literacy activities with their children. Notably, children who were read to often had high reading performance.

⁷ European countries participating in PIRLS 2001 are: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, England, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Rep. of Macedonia, Rep. of Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Russian Federation, Scotland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Sweden. In PISA 2000 the following European countries participated: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (Scotland).

Index of home educational resources

Based on parents' and students' reports, an Index of Home Educational Resources was also used. A high score on this index indicates: more than 100 books in the home, more than 25 children's books, presence of 3 or 4 educational aids (computer, study desk for own use, books of their own, access to daily newspaper) and where at least one parent finished university (Mullis et al., 2003, 105). Students from homes with extensive educational resources had higher achievement in reading. Children in homes with many children's books (more than 100) had higher reading achievement than homes with fewer than 10 children's books.

Parents as literacy models

PIRLS assessed parents' reading habits and attitudes. Students with the highest reading achievement had parents who spent more than 10 hours a week reading at home (Mullis et al., 2003, 122). Likewise students whose parents read for enjoyment every day or nearly every day had a higher reading performance. This relates to parents' positive attitudes toward reading. The Index of Parents' Attitudes Toward Reading is based on parents' agreement with items like the following: "I like to read", "I like talking about books to other people", "Reading is an important activity in my home". The results are presented in figure 1.

Figure 1: Results from PIRLS: Top Three Countries on Different Aspects of Parental Support

<p>Countries with the highest percentage of students in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• high level of Early Home Literacy Activities: England (83%), Scotland (82%), Russian Federation (66%), international average 52% (Mullis et al., 2003, 97)• high level of Home Educational Resources: Norway (33%), England (27%), Sweden (26%) international average 13% (Mullis et al., 2003, 105)• parents read at home more than 10 hours a week: Bulgaria (27%), Scotland (27%) Norway and Sweden (both 23%) international average 17% (Mullis et al., 2003, 122)• high index of Parents' Attitudes Toward Reading Hungary (74%), Norway (73%) and Sweden (71%), international average 53 % (Mullis et al., 2003, 124)
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PISA provides three indicators from the students' questionnaire, all correlated with reading performance:

Index of cultural possessions in the home

PISA asked students about possessions in their home related to classical culture, such as literature and arts.

On a measure of participation in cultural activities, students reported on activities related to classical culture, such as visiting a museum or art gallery, watching live theatre, or attending an opera, ballet or classical symphony concert, communication on aspects of culture.

On a measure of frequency of communication, PISA asked students how frequently they communicated with their parents on cultural aspects (discussing political or social issues; discussing books, films or television programmes; listening to music together) and social issues (discussing how well the student was doing in school; eating the main meal with the student; and spending time just talking). On average, cultural communication shows a stronger relationship with reading scores than does social communication (OECD, 2001, 147).

The results are presented in figure 2.

Figure 2: Results from PISA: Top 3 Countries in Terms of Cultural Activities and Possessions

Countries with the highest levels of:

- cultural possessions: Iceland, Latvia, Russian Federation (OECD, 2001,144)
- participation in cultural activities: Czech Republic, Hungary and Latvia (OECD, 2001,146)
- communication on aspect of culture: Italy, Hungary, France (OECD, 2001,147)

2) Children Have the Right to Attend Preschool or Kindergarten

The transition from a family to a school environment is a big step in a child's life. Preschools, kindergartens or similar programs might be useful in helping children and to prepare them for school. Furthermore these institutions offer children valuable opportunities to interact with peers. This is important because in the modern family children do not have many siblings.

PIRLS revealed that the average reading achievement was lowest among students not attending preschool and highest among those who attended for more than two years (Mullis et al., 2003, 130). In the absence of qualitative data (how well do preschools work?) a quantitative measure was used: the number of children attending preschool, kindergarten or similar programmes for more than 2 years (Mullis et al., 2003, 130). The results are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Top 3 Countries with Highest Percentage of Children Attending Preschool

Countries with the highest amount of children attending preschool for at least 2 years are: France (88%), Hungary (86%), Italy (78%), with an international average of 40%.

Leaving the level of preschool and kindergarten we now move on to the school and start with school resources related to the third right.

3) Children Have a Right to Favourable Educational Resources at School Fostering the Acquisition of Literacy

An adequate supply of educational resources is an important factor in a favourable learning environment, even if it may not guarantee high performance. For the acquisition of literacy the child's access to a wide variety of books and other reading materials as well as to computers in classroom and school is essential. PIRLS and PISA assessed different aspects of school environment and resources.

PIRLS asked for the availability and the use of libraries and computers in classroom and schools. Almost all fourth-grade students attended schools with a school library. More than half of the students also had classroom libraries. Despite the widespread availability of classroom libraries teachers reported using them relatively infrequently. Classroom libraries are under-used. In PIRLS there was a correlation between the frequency of using a classroom library or a reading corner and the average reading achievement (Mullis et al., 2003, 203ff). Concerning computer availability and use for reading instruction there was a remarkable variability between countries (Mullis et al., 2003, 254). The following indicators were used for our analysis.

From PIRLS:

- Students using a library in school every day (teacher report)
- Teacher reported that students used either a classroom library (or a reading corner) or school library every day or nearly every day.
- Students reporting using a computer at school at least once a week

From PISA:

- Principals' views on the quality of educational resources at school
- PISA asked principals for the adequacy of educational resources, such as computers, library and teaching materials, including textbooks, and multimedia resources for learning.

The results are presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Top Three Countries in PIRLS and PISA Concerning Favourable Educational Resources in School.

<p>Results from PIRLS (%)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students using class or school library every day: Russian Federation (68%), Slovenia (66%), Moldova and Netherlands (both 61%), international average 44% (Mullis et al., 2003, p. 208) • Students who reported using a computer at school at least once a week: England (67%), Scotland (63%), Iceland (59%); international average 29% (Mullis et al., 2003, 212) <p>Result from PISA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest on index of the quality of schools' educational resources: Switzerland, Hungary, Belgium (OECD, 2001, Table 7.10, p. 304)
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4) Children Have a Right to Appropriate Instruction Based on Their Individual Needs

In PIRLS teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire and we learn much about the organization of reading instruction, and the activities of teachers and students, as well as instructional materials. Because of the absence of observational data, it is difficult to answer the question, in which country do students receive the most appropriate instruction in terms of their individual needs?

Looking at the international data, the main results from the teacher questionnaire are: Teaching reading as a whole-class activity was the most popular approach; about half of the students were reading the same materials but at their own speed and another one-third were reading different reading materials according to their reading level.

My assumption is that the organization of reading instruction might meet individual needs of students when teachers report:

- using a variety of organizational approaches; and
- using different instructional material for students at different reading levels.

The answers of teachers on these organizational aspects of reading instruction were used as indicators. The results are presented in figure 5.

Figure 5: Top Three Countries in Terms of Organisational Aspects of Reading Instruction

<p>Results from PIRLS (% of students)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers reporting using a variety of organizational approaches: Hungary (85%), Slovenia (84%), Norway (73%), International average 46% (Mullis et al., 2003, p. 156) • Students using different instructional material at different reading levels: Scotland (89%), England (69%), Iceland (62%), International average 32% (Mullis et al., 2003, p. 154)

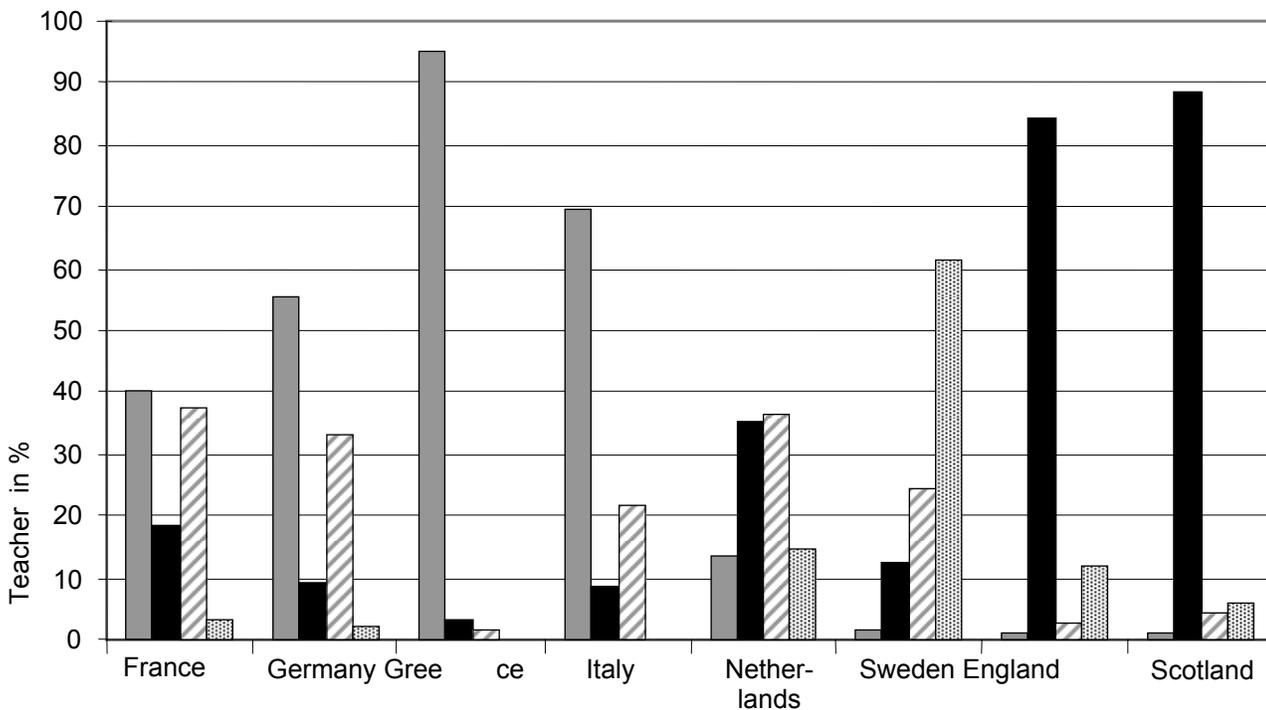
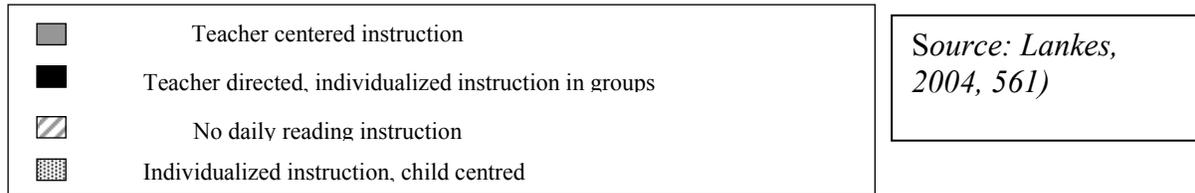
The numbers for Hungary have to be handled with caution, because of the small data base (Mullis et al., 2003, p. 156).

The PIRLS questionnaires for teachers and principals offer a multitude of bits of pieces of information, elements of a puzzle about reading instruction that we have to put together. Using more refined statistical methods we can put the elements in order and so construct a more coherent picture. Eva Lankes, leader of the German PIRLS 2001 team, used the information given by teachers concerning teaching methods, materials, organization of reading instruction, and activities of the students – namely those features that may indicate a child-centred instruction. She included 8 European countries. By means of Latent-Class-Analysis she identified 4 groups of teachers with 4 different instruction types, presented in the different columns of table 1:

- no daily reading instruction in fourth grade
- *teacher-centred instruction*. Teachers use standardized reading material and teach the whole class (esp. in Greece, but also in Italy, Germany and France).

- *individualized instruction*. Teachers don't use much structure or direct teaching. Children often read children's books. This type is most often seen in Sweden.
- children work in groups and have *individualized methods but the instruction is teacher directed* (very often seen in England and Scotland).

Table 1 : Distribution of groups of teachers with different instruction types



According to the analysis done by Lankes in 8 selected countries, students seem to receive individualized instruction in Sweden, England and Scotland (Lankes, 2004).

5) Children Have a Right to be Supported by Teachers

An important factor of success and well-being in school is perceived teacher support – the feeling of the students that teachers encourage and support their learning. Students feel and do better if teachers are interested in their progress and their problems.

In PISA students were asked to indicate the frequency with which teachers show an interest in every student's learning, give students an opportunity to express opinions, help students with their work and continue to teach until students understand.

The relationship between student performance and teacher support turned out to be complex. The correlation between the index of teacher support and performance is not positive in all countries, perhaps because teacher support may be limited to the weak performers or because "supportiveness" may not be an important element in teachers professional culture (OECD 2001, p. 162). Nonetheless, I think teacher support is a goal in itself, regardless of the relation to reading performance. If we look at the data we find:

Countries with the highest index of perceived teacher support are United Kingdom, Portugal and Denmark.

6) Children Who Are Struggling with Reading Have a Right to Receive Intensive Instruction from Professionals Specifically Prepared to Teach Reading

PIRLS asked teachers about the availability and the use of remedial or reading specialists or other professionals (learning specialists, speech specialists, etc.) to help students having reading difficulties. Internationally the vast majority (54%) of students were in classes where the teachers reported having access to specialists (Mullis et al., 2003, 161). Countries where almost all students were in classes where the teacher could call on some kind of professional assistance were Iceland, the Netherlands and Scotland. Internationally about one third of students falling behind in reading are working with remedial or reading specialists (Mullis et al., 2003, 163). Figure 6 presents the results.

Figure 6: Top Five Countries from PIRLS for Availability and Use of Remedial or Reading Specialists (Percentage of Students)

- Availability of professional assistance:
Scotland (94%); Netherlands (93%); Iceland (90%),
international average 54% (Mullis et al., 2003, p. 161)
- Students falling behind in reading who worked with remedial or reading specialists
Iceland (82%), Sweden (77%); Netherlands (76%),
International average 31 % (Mullis et al., 2003, p. 163)

7) Children Have the Right to Equal Educational Opportunity, Regardless of Social Class, Gender and Nationality

Article 28 of the Convention of the Rights of Children states that children have a right to educational opportunity. The big challenge for countries is to achieve jointly high overall student performance and low disparities between socio-economic groups, between genders and between children with and without a background of migration. The majority of statistical analyses provided by PISA are dedicated to this topic. So I will only point out the key results:

The European countries that are most successful in softening the impact of socio-economic background, and manage to combine a relatively high quality of student performance with relatively high equality between socio-economic groups are Finland, Iceland and Sweden. This shows that schools and education systems can succeed in moderating the relationship between social background and learning outcomes.

Eliminating gender gaps in reading performance is another challenge. On average the difference in performance between male and female in reading is 32 points (one third of the OECD average standard deviation), with the lowest difference (about 25) in Spain, Portugal and Denmark. Several countries combine low gender inequality with high performance including Ireland and United Kingdom (OECD, 2001, p. 125).

In PIRLS in all countries, girls had significantly higher reading literacy achievement than boys. The international average was 20 points (Mullis et al., 2003, 30). Countries which combine low gender inequality with high performance are Italy, Czech Republic and Germany (Mullis et al., p. 30, Bos et al., 2003, p. 115).

Concerning nationality, both PIRLS and PISA found out that students who spoke the majority language as their mother tongue outperformed those whose mother tongue was a minority language. In most countries with a large immigrant population, students born abroad or with immigrant parents read well below native students. With regard to educational opportunity of immigrant students the picture is very complex because of different circumstances of their relocation: differences in social-cultural background interact with differences in the effectiveness of the education system into which they have moved. So no data are presented here because it is difficult to make valid comparisons.

The rights referred to up to now have been concerned with learning to know and learning to do. We will now turn to the next pillar of education for the 21st century “*learning to live together*”.

8) Children Have a Right to Favourable Conditions in School to Learn to Live Together in Peace and Harmony

Living together in harmony is not only an *aim* of education but also a *means* and constitutes an important feature of school climate and a positive learning environment.

In the PIRLS data base 3 indicators are available:

- students reporting feeling safe in school
- a low level of incidence of violence
- principals’ perception of school safety.

Students were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that they felt safe in school. Feeling safe in school is an important factor of well-being as basis for learning. As one indication for the level of violence students had to answer “yes” or “no” to the question of being hit or hurt at school in the last month. Principals were asked about the degree to which each of the following was a school problem: classroom disturbances, cheating, swearing, vandalism, theft, intimidation or verbal abuse of other students, and physical conflicts among students. This resulted in an index of Principals’ Perception of School Safety (Mullis et al., 2003, 250).

If we look at the PIRLS results there is no linear relationship between the percentage of students who agree/disagree with feeling safe in school and reading competence. However, students who disagree a lot have the lowest average achievement. Students answering “no” to the question of being hit or hurt at school in the last month had higher scores in reading achievement than those answering with “yes”. The Index of Principals’ Perception of School Safety correlated with reading achievement (Mullis et al., 2003, 250). The results for the right to live together in peace and harmony are presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Results from PIRLS: Top Three Countries for Indicators of “Learning to Live Together”

- Students reporting feeling safe in school:
Macedonia (87%), Romania (82%), Greece (79%)
International average 64% (Mullis et al., 2003, p. 247)
- Students answering “no” to the question of being hit or hurt at school in the last month:
Norway (84%), Czech Republic (80%), Slovak Republic (79%)
International average 68% (Mullis et al., 2003, p. 249)
- High level of Principals’ Perceptions of School Safety:
Russian Federation (92%), Romania (87%), Moldova (76%)
International average 58% (Mullis et al., 2003, p. 250)

The PISA database offers the opportunity for choosing three further indicators:

- feeling a sense of belonging in school

PISA measured the sense of belonging based on students’ responses to 6 items describing their personal feelings about being accepted by their peers and whether or not they felt lonely, “like an outsider” or “out of place” (OECD, 2003 b).

- principals’ reports of student-related factors affecting school climate

PISA also studied the disciplinary climate in the school. Principals were asked to their perception of student-related factors affecting school climate such as disruptive behaviour, students lacking respect for teachers, and bullying of students as well as student absenteeism.

- students feeling positive about learning in co-operative situations

Since working in a team might be essential for future academic success and learning, in this section I will also look at a further indicator for learning to live together: students feeling positive about learning in co-

operative situations. PISA confronted the students with statements about whether they felt positive about learning in co-operative situations (OECD, 2003, 44). The results are presented in figure 8.

Figure 8: Results from PISA: Top Three Countries for Indicators of “Learning to Live Together”

- Highest level of sense of belonging in school:
Sweden, Austria and Switzerland (OECD, 2003b, p. 20)
- Highest level of principals’ report of school climate:
Denmark, Czech Republic and Belgium (OECD, 2001, Table 7.2, p. 296)
- Students feeling positive about learning in co-operative situations:
Denmark, Portugal and Norway (OECD, 2003a, p. 110)

The next right refers to the fourth pillar of education “*learning to be*”.

9) Children Have a Right to Learning Environments that Helps Them to Develop Positive Self-related Beliefs and Confidence in Their Own Learning Abilities

Both the Convention of the rights of the child and the UNESCO report of the Commission on Education for the 21st Century assert as a fundamental principle that education should contribute to the full and harmonious development of the individual’s personality. Education has to ensure that everyone has the personal resources and the intellectual tools to cope with the tasks of life, to solve his or her own problems and shoulder his or her own responsibilities. Literacy is an important competence for participating in the social, cultural and political domains of our society. Children and young people must not only become literate, but, to make use of this competence, they also need to develop favourable personality characteristics such as motivation and positive self-related beliefs.

PIRLS and PISA have shown that students who approach learning with a strong belief in themselves and who read for pleasure outside school are more likely than other students to achieve high scores on tests of reading literacy. But I think that positive self-related beliefs and confidence in one’s own learning abilities are desirable as outcomes in themselves.

In this section of my presentation I will look at three indicators: the scores students have in:

- *self-concepts in reading*;
- *reading for pleasure outside school*; and
- *self-efficacy* – the belief in one’s own ability to overcome difficulties and to handle learning situations effectively.

These scores are dependent on self-reports and it is possible that students react to these questions differently, because of different cultural norms concerning modesty, scepticism or self-assertion. The PISA team sees these difficulties but suggests that the strength of the student attributes referring to self-concept in reading and self-efficacy can still be directly compared across cultures (OECD, 2003a, 39). Let’s look at the self-concept data first. The results are presented in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Top Three Countries in Terms of Favourable Reading Self-concepts

- Highest index of students’ reading self concept:
 - PIRLS: Italy (56%), Sweden (54%), Bulgaria (52%),
International average 40% (Mullis et al., 2003, p. 263).
 - PISA: Denmark, Ireland and Italy (OECD 2003a, p. 110)

The results for reading for fun outside school are presented in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Top Three Countries in Terms of Student’s Reading for Pleasure Outside School

PIRLS

- Students reporting reading for fun outside school every day or almost every day:

Russian Federation (59%), Lithuania (53%), Iceland (52%),
International average: 40% (Mullis et al., 2003, 268)

PISA

- Students reporting reading for pleasure outside school daily for at least one hour:
Russian Federation (31%), Greece (29%), Poland (25%), OECD average 14% (source: OECD, 2001, table 4.4, p.268)

As figure 10 shows, there is internationally a remarkable drop in reading for pleasure outside school between the ages of 10 or so and 15. Self-efficacy, the degree to which students believe they can deal with learning challenges, even if they find them difficult, are highest in the PISA countries Austria, Sweden and Scotland (Scotland was the only country of the United Kingdom that participated) (OECD, 2003a, 110).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have reflected a long time on whether to produce and show overall country rankings on the indicators used here for the review of children's rights. At first I decided not to, in order to avoid this winner/loser perspective, because the child, not the country should be at the centre of consideration. However, I ended up deciding to show these rankings, because you can do it alone just by counting how often a country has been mentioned. But this can only be done with caution:

- Self report measures may not be directly comparable. If indices are constructed, measurement errors multiply.
- The indicators used here are not independent and may not be of equal weight.
- The distance between the scores of the top 3 countries and those of other countries may not be significant.

With these dangers of interpretation in mind, we allocated one point for each mention of a country as being among the top 3 countries for PIRLS and PISA-based indices. This process resulted in the following scores for frequency of mention. (The results from the Lankes analysis are not included here, because only 8 European countries were included).

Figure 11: Cumulative Results for the Analyses of the PIRLS and PISA Data

PIRLS

5 points: Iceland, Norway, Scotland, Sweden

4 points: England, Russian Federation

3 points: Hungary, Italy

2 points: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Moldova, Romania, Slovenia

1 point: France, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Macedonia, Slovak Republic

PISA

4 points: Denmark

3 points: Sweden, Hungary, United Kingdom/Scotland

2 points: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Russian Federation, Switzerland

1 point: Finland, France, Greece, Norway, Poland

What may we conclude? Each country should examine whether children are given appropriate conditions in their environment and should take all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures to ensure the rights of their children to education.

The power point tool created by the PISA/PIRLS Task Force of the International Reading Association may be helpful for discussing national reading achievement. The title is: *National Reading Achievement: Using PISA/PIRLS Data for Informed Discussion*. It is located at www.reading.org/resources/issues/reports/pisa.html.

Members of the Task Force are Renate Valtin, Germany (chair), William Brozo, US, Maria Lourdes Dionisio, Portugal, Keith Topping, Scotland, and Cathy Roller, International Reading Association.

Let me close with a remark from the Delors Report of the Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century:

“Education is an expression of affection for children and young people, whom we need to welcome into society, unreservedly offering them the place that is theirs by right therein” (Delors, 1998, 10).

The data from international studies may be used to examine whether the national educational system supports young learners and whether or not a specific country offers a warm welcome.

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