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Youth Engagement and Citizenship in England

Ian Davies

Contents

Abstract

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Keywords

Youth engagement · Education · England policy · Professional practice

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Introduction

Drawing on and analyzing existing theoretical and empirical research literature, this chapter explores the relationship between youth engagement and education in England, principally during the period 1998 to 2017. While the importance of youth engagement and education has formed a core part of policy and practice during this period, the relationship is one which has been characterized by different approaches at different times. These differing approaches have frequently been influenced by the particular agendas of key actors – including governments, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, and schools. In order to provide a foundation for the argument in this chapter, I make some general remarks about the meaning of key terms related to youth engagement, provide some contextual comments about recent political developments, and outline the history of educational initiatives relevant to youth engagement. The chapter then examines several issues that influence the ways in which young people's engagement is framed with references to levels of engagement, styles of engagement, and engines of engagement. I provide an overview of some of the research about young people's engagement in England (in amount and type) and the factors that are seen to be associated with such engagement. It is argued that while there is some clarity in understanding about the extent, nature, and cause of engagement, there are also some indications that research that has led to that understanding has been ignored through a party political process in which ideological considerations are emphasized. Finally, I discuss ways in which a positive relationship between youth engagement and education could be developed and conclude by raising some questions about what work in this area remains to be done.

Background: The Meaning of Key Terms

In England, since about 2008, there has been less official interest in citizenship education than existed in the previous decade. The central government department responsible for education has devoted less time and energy to citizenship education (the ways in which that has happened and the reasons for it are discussed below). That said, there is nationally and internationally significant work still being done in this area. The continued attention to young people's engagement with citizenship beyond official policies may be seen in initiatives taken by international bodies (e.g., Carnegie – see http://carnegieendowment.org/specialprojects/civicresearchnetwork/), academia with recent issues of the journals *Citizenship Teaching and Learning* (Sears 2017), and the *Journal of Social Science Education* (Davies et al. 2014), and new networks (e.g., Partispace, see http://partispace.eu/). These various activities, in some ways, relate very positively to earlier government policy developments that were aimed at developing active citizenship (e.g., DfEE/QCA 1998 and http://www.parliament.uk/citizenship-civic-engagement). However, it should be noted that much of the work in citizenship education and, more precisely, education that encourages understanding of contemporary society

and engagement in it, remains contested and controversial in England, as elsewhere. As such, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of key terms.

The quotation below gives an overarching sense of what is involved when engagement in contemporary society is referred to. According to Marquand (2004), engagement is:

> ...a dimension of social life, with its own norms and decision rules... a set of activities, which can be (and historically has been) carried out by private individuals, private charities and even private firms as well as public agencies. It is symbiotically linked to the notion of public interest, in principle distinct from private interests; central to it are the values of citizenship, equity and service...It is ... a space for forms of human flourishing which cannot be bought in the market place or found in the tight-knit community of the clan or family. (p. 27)

Therefore, in short, engagement in general terms means participating in one's social communities beyond the immediate family. Of course, further clarification is needed about many things including, referring to the above quotation, the distinctions to be made between "public" and "private," and the meaning of "social life." It would be unwise to suggest that engagement does not occur within family or other personal groups and indeed those contexts are often the places where identity is given clearest expression through power-related interpersonal action.

One of the principal debates about the meaning of engagement is focused on location. In other words, there are questions about where one may take part, and, more generally, this raises issues about the boundaries between legally framed characterizations of engagement and affectively oriented perceptions of thinking and action. Some academics, such as Tarrow (2005), emphasize the significance of transnationalism, whereas Crick (2000, pp. 136, 137), for example, cites Hannah, Arendt, to assert that "a citizen is by definition a citizen among citizens of a country among countries." Furthermore, there are many contemporary contexts (e.g., Catalonia; Corsica) in which it is hard to identify the preferred formulation of the country in which one may take part. Indeed, such formulations are not always fixed, as the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence and continuing discussion about the border between Northern Ireland and Eire shows within the UK context.

In reference to citizenship and engagement, these arguments about the role of place connect with discussions about the degree to which pluralistic societal coherence may be achieved. Much of the debate which manifested in educational policy documents about young people's engagement in England since the late 1990s has focused on engendering a sense of togetherness through:

> a society in which there is a *common vision* and *sense of belonging* by all communities; a society in which the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued; a society in which similar life opportunities are available to all; and a society in which strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community. (DCSF 2007, p. 3)

This said, some of these overarching goals as stated in policy documents tend to hide the different meanings of community within which engagement may occur. Annette, for example, has pointed to the different meanings of community:

> as a place or neighbourhood ... as a normative ideal linked to respect, inclusion and solidarity ... as something based on a politics of identity and recognition of difference ... as a political ideal linked to participation, involvement and citizenship. (2003, p. 140)

It is important to recognize these different meanings in order to be able to make judgments about what sort of fundamental issues are at stake. Heater (1999, p. 77), AU3
for example, has explained that certain characterizations of community can mean something that is very challenging:

> Communitarianism extracts from the republican tradition the concentration on a feeling of community and a sense of duty, though omitting from its programme the strand of direct political participation and, some would argue, crucially, the central republican concern for freedom.

Of particular significance to my view of engagement are *political* issues. In this regard, the following definition can be viewed as particularly apt: "Youth activism refers to behaviour performed by adolescents and young adults with a political intent" Hart and Linkin Gullan (2010, p. 67). In order for the connection between youth activism and the political sphere/discourse to be considered meaningfully there is a need to give a fairly simple – but nevertheless dynamic – characterization of the terms "politics" and "citizens":

> Politics then can simply be defined as the activity by which differing interests within a given unit of rule are conciliated by giving them a share in power in proportion to their importance to the welfare and the survival of the whole community. (Crick 1964 p. 21)

Citizens may be described in the following terms:

> Individuals are citizens when they practise civic virtue and good citizenship, enjoy but do not exploit their civil and political rights, contribute to and receive social and economic benefits do not allow any sense of national identity to justify discrimination or stereotyping of others, experiences senses of non –exclusive multiple citizenship and, by their example, teach AU4
> citizenship to others. (Heater and Oliver 1994, p. 6)

A focus on politics allows for engagement to be centrally about power, to recognize the primacy of the individual in human rights discourses, to see the vital importance of groups acting in a range (geographically based and other) of diverse communities, to value the rights and responsibilities of a legally framed status of citizenship and to embrace the dynamism offered by considerations of politics in everyday contexts. The focus on politics allows for a helpfully precise characterization of what I think is important in engagement. Moreover, the risk of embracing too many things and achieving only a rather woolly sense of what engagement means

might well be avoided by interpreting all that we do through the lens of the fundamental concepts of politics.

Background: The English Political Context

In the UK, successive Prime Ministers have consistently argued for young people to engage in society. (In the United Kingdom, certain legislative powers remain with the central UK Parliament, while others – such as education – are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, and Northern Ireland. On these devolved powers, the central UK Parliament legislates for England.) During his period in office, Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair (1997–2007), was committed to what he considered a communitarian approach. Broadly, this approach consisted of the attempt to steer a middle course between the excesses of both unfettered neoliberalism, with its commitment to solving everything through market forces, and certain forms of socialism in which opportunities for individual or private group–based activity were not encouraged or allowed. In this approach, Blair was influenced by sociologists, including Giddens (2000) and Etzioni (1995), who had also influenced other politicians including Clinton in the USA. A commitment to youth engagement and activism was also explicitly stated by Blair's successor as Labour Prime Minister, Gordon Brown (2007–2010), who argued that:

> It is my ambition to create a country in which there is a clear expectation that all young people will undertake some service to their community, and where community service will become normal part of growing up. (Brown 2009)

Leader of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition (2010–2015) and Conservative (2015–2016) governments, Prime Minister David Cameron seemed to continue, broadly, this approach, creating the *National Citizen Service* and also focusing on what he called "the Big Society" which, in part, was designed to engage people in their communities. According to Cameron:

> The Big Society is about a huge culture change, where people, in their everyday lives, in their homes, in their neighbourhoods, in their workplace, don't always turn to officials, local authorities or central government for answers to the problems they face, but instead feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities. (Cameron 2010)

It is possible that the intention for the Big Society was for citizens to feel free, able, and empowered to help their communities, but the Big Society also linked to the desire for a healthy economy (in that engaged people create wealth). The nature of the desired enterprise was of a particular type, while the sort of action Cameron was looking for was driven by certain agendas which had their limits. One agenda can be seen, for example, in certain reactions to the 2011 riots in English cities, as the following critique highlights:

> Mr Cameron will also blame "children without fathers; schools without discipline; reward without effort; crime without punishment; rights without responsibilities; communities without control".
>
> Mending that "broken society", Mr Cameron will say, is his fundamental aim in politics. (Kirkup et al. 2011)

The above indicates some of the challenges of, and different ways of framing, arguments for engagement. Successive governments in England have wanted to promote particular sorts of engagement that emerge from particular ideological perspectives. As has been suggested above, a broad-based communitarian agenda shaped the desire for youth engagement under Blair and Brown, but after the General Election of 2010, the agenda became more precisely focused on a political project in which young people's action that was not contributing to established norms was not accepted.

The current Prime Minister (January 2018) Theresa May, while opposing votes at 16, is also in favor of the more limited form of youth engagement which has framed government discourse since 2010:

> people can get engaged in politics in a whole variety of ways and I would encourage young people to do so.
>
> I think it is important young people watch politics, pay attention to politics, get to think about their own views and where possible start to get involved. (Stone 2017)

The hesitation and caution of May in suggesting young people think about things and "where possible start to get involved" mean that low-level traditionally framed actions to support established systems and processes are being promoted. The government's position here is not an open-ended commitment to democratic engagement. One of the most obvious ways in which the more limited commitment to youth engagement can be seen is to consider politicians' actions about perceived radicalism. It is likely that the determination to achieve youth engagement in a society in which law and order is emphasized is connected to fears about the rise of perceived radical groups (Kyriacou et al. 2017). The complex relationship between engaged, cohesive, and inclusive democracy and attempts to achieve more precisely focused predetermined "good" actions is thrown sharply into relief by the above. While it would be naïve and simplistic to suggest that there are unsophisticated divisions between conservative and radical conceptions of engagement, what is evident from official sources in recent years is an emphasis on what is deemed as good behavior and an absence of encouragement for critique. Furthermore, unwanted behavior in the form of radicalization has been presented principally, and overly narrowly, as a concern with certain groups in society – particularly Muslims (Qurashi 2016).

The financial crisis since 2008 has been significant for changing attitudes and opportunities, and this has been particularly noticeable in European matters. Hoskins and Kerr (2012) note that:

> the global economic and financial crisis . . .. has been allied with a change in the political philosophy of governments across Europe in the past few years. This has seen more

> governments favouring support for community activity, as opposed to conventional political participation, with a smaller perceived role for government in society overall. The combined consequence of the economic crisis and the smaller perceived role of the state have meant that the field of Participatory Citizenship has fallen from prominence as a policy priority at national and local level and, as a consequence, there has been much less funding for the whole domain including through national, local and private sector contributions. The strains of the cuts in funding have been noted within civil society across Europe and at the European level. (p. 8)

A significant feature of the current political landscape in England relates to the departure of the UK from the European Union. The sort of transnational citizenship that was narrowly rejected by voters in the 2016 referendum on membership of the European Union probably occurred in light of fears about migrants taking jobs and putting pressure on public services, as well as an attempt to take back control in a context where there was anger expressed against elites (see https://ec.europa.eu/epale/en/blog/brexit-and-its-implications-citizenship-education-across-europe). The populism that fed the Brexit campaign is, of course, clear evidence of a sort of engagement. And that campaign took place in the context of negative attitudes towards immigrants:

> Existing evidence clearly shows high levels of opposition to immigration in the UK. In recent surveys, majorities of respondents think that there are too many migrants, that fewer migrants should be let in to the country, and that legal restrictions on immigration should be tighter. (Blinder and Allen 2016, p. 4)

The 31st NatCen Social Research British Social Attitudes survey was reported as indicating that "British attitudes harden towards immigrants" (https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jun/17/immigration-british-attitudes-harden-benefits) and the campaign itself saw allegations of xenophobia in, for example, the activities of the UK Independence Party and the murder of a member of parliament by a member of an extreme right wing group. This general picture is not necessarily to suggest that young people hold such views and take such actions. The fact that 71% of young people aged 18–25 in the UK voted to remain in the EU is perhaps an indication, first, of divisions in society and, second, about differences concerning to what outcomes societal engagement should lead.

Youth Activism in England: The Educational Context

Within England there have been many attempts historically to align youth engagement with their formal education. For example, the work of Henry Morris in the Cambridgeshire village colleges in the 1930s, the work of Leicestershire Community Colleges, and Eric Midwinter's and others efforts to establish urban community schools, all illustrate an approach to education in which engagement in communities was promoted.

The types of education explicitly relevant to youth activism and engagement have seen extreme variations. The general neglect of an explicit approach prior to the 1960s was followed in the 1970s by an emphasis on political literacy (skills and issues about politics in everyday life), a string of educations about and for peace, the globe, anti-sexism, anti-racism, and so on in the 1980s and promotions of youth volunteering in the early 1990s. The highly influential Final Report of the Advisory Group on Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools (known commonly as the Crick Report, 1998) which led to the statutory inclusion of Citizenship education in the National Curriculum for secondary (11–16-year olds) schools emphasized social and moral responsibility, political literacy, and community involvement. From 2010, there has been a return to civics, financial literacy, volunteering, and character in government discourses and policies on youth engagement.

Legislation has been passed to ensure that a version of professionally responsible engagement is maintained. Sections 406 and 407 of the 1996 Education Act insist on the duty to secure balanced treatment of political issues. The Equality Act 2010 Advice for Schools and the Prevent Strategy (June 2011) (which sees British values as democracy; the rule of law; individual liberty and mutual respect; tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs) are relevant. An official document on Promoting fundamental British values as part of spiritual, moral, social, and cultural education in schools (DfE 2014), as well as the School Inspection Handbook (Ofsted January 2015) carry significant guidance for schools and teachers. Teachers are required to insist on the sort of engagement that has been explained above: an opposition to perceived radicalization and a commitment to young people starting to get involved in a context which is influenced by anti-immigrant views. AU6

Citizenship education is currently, in early 2018, part of the National Curriculum but there have been very recent dramatic changes. Up to 2014, there was a strong conceptual core (democracy and justice; rights and responsibilities; identities and diversity). The work was inspired by political literacy, emphasizing communities at local, national, and global levels and which is contemporary, public, participative, and reflective. The current National Curriculum for Citizenship (since September 2014) emphasizes civics (knowledge of constitutional politics and the legal system), volunteering, and personal money management together with a nonstatutory character education that highlights perseverance, resilience, and grit. This emphasis on character, which has been explored by Kisby (2017), may be part of a neo-conservative moral agenda. While character education may have positive potential, there are reservations about its nature which are acknowledged in attempted rebuttals by its proponents (e.g., Kristjansson 2013).This moral agenda may also be connected with adult fear of young people (Halsey and White 2008). In addition, it has been argued on the basis of empirical research that increasing levels of mental health issues following the 2008 recession may make engagement more difficult (Katikireddi et al. 2017).

Levels, Styles and Engines of Engagement

The need to understand engagement (its levels and styles) is the subject of wide ranging debate, with many academics coining phrases and framing characterizations. Fallahzadeh (2016) has summarized a range of work such as "mundane citizenship" (Bakardjieva 2012), "self-actualizing citizen" (Bennett et al. 2011), "networking citizen" (Loader et al. 2014), "critical citizen" (Norris 1999), and "everyday-maker" (Bang and Sorensen 1999). These formulations are placed against overarching characterizations of engagement which make use of, for example, models of micro and macro participation. The micro emerges from the relationship between individual citizens and the state in which, for example, engagement would be revealed by an individual parent approaching a teacher to request (or demand) help for their own child. The macro includes collective action, such as voting and trade union or pressure group activity. Either implicitly or explicitly, these models may connect with bonding capital (i.e., people with similar characteristics) and bridging capital (i.e., people with different characteristics) in the interests of promoting engagement.

It is not straightforward to identify the level of youth engagement in terms of civic action that is taking place. In part, this is because there is developmental discontinuity rather than a clear and simple process as people age (Sherrod et al. 2010). In other words, the nature of engagement may develop variously, and the meanings, interpretations, and perceptions about engagement may shift. There are also hard to interpret differences between people's social capital. It has been argued that young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely than others to engage in certain forms of civic action (Andrews 2009). Those with low levels of social capital are less likely than others to engage in established associational activity. High status charitable bodies, for example, may not be approached by young, working class men and women from some ethnic groups. Cremin et al. (2009) have emphasized the key determinant of engagement as being "whether or not the young person has the knowledge, networks, and skills to be able to act upon a civic issue of concern".

Of perhaps greater significance than the challenges of identifying clear patterns of engagement is the issue of the characterization of engagement itself. Many surveys take fairly crude measurements of engagement to indicate that approximately half or more of young people have experience of volunteering (see Davies et al. 2013 for a fuller exploration). However, this may include involvement in sports and exercise, hobbies and recreation, youth and children's services, and health and social welfare, which may be regarded as not fitting easily alongside the political essence of civic engagement. Nevertheless, using a broad interpretation of engagement, there are positive indicators:

> . . ... many young people of all types and backgrounds are involved in informal voluntary and community action. Studies show around three quarters of young people have been involved in 'constructive social participation' through community networks, neighbourliness, campaigning or informal political action. (Gaskin 2004, p. iv)

And even when these activities are described with a little more precision, there exist some encouraging data for those who think that levels of youth engagement are positive, including that "42% of young people aged between 10 and 20 years participated in 'meaningful social action' in the UK – this is slightly broader than volunteering" (http://www.ivr.org.uk/ivr-volunteering-stats/177-how-many-young-people-volunteer, accessed 11 September 2016). However, perhaps the key challenge is to interpret these statements by knowing more precisely what is meant by "engagement," "volunteering," and "meaningful social action." Perhaps, depending on one's definition and preferred measurements, it is almost impossible not to engage in society. If that is the case, then survey data about engagement may merely indicate levels of acceptable, or social class defined, involvement. The possibility thus exists of unhelpful circularity in an exclusionary process (where, for example, working class people cannot be engaged in "real" activity). As such, when connections are made between engagement and health, life satisfaction and educational level, this may only be deemed to be a reasonable interpretation when engagement is seen as the effect of positive lifestyle rather than the cause.

What facilitates participation for young people in England? In addition to those factors already referred to above (perhaps especially distribution of social capital), evidence suggests that there are broad engines of engagement. There are general societal factors that help or hinder engagement. In their work outside the English context, but which is highly apt to it, Amnå and Zetterberg (2010) argue that there are various perspectives on what promotes involvement including modernization (as people become better off, they want more of a say in public affairs); the public institutional hypothesis (the design and performance of democratic systems may facilitate or hinder engagement); the social capital hypothesis (the connections between individuals facilitate or hinder engagement); and civic volunteerism (the resources – especially time and money – available to people determine their capacity to engage). Within these perspectives, there are significant trends that may explain engagement. For example, consumerism (including decisions to buy or not buy certain products and although dismissed by some as mere "clicktivism," e.g., https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/sep/24/clicktivism-changed-political-campaigns-38-degrees-change) may be one of the major ways in which public expression occurs, and there are many NGOs which deliberately emphasize this approach.

Engagement may emerge not from broad societal factors as above but in relation to the possibility of personality traits and emotion. In this sense, it is possible we have moved some way from resource mobilization theories in which money, communications, and public support are seen as key factors. Emotion in the identification of common enemies; establishment of personal relationships; and performance of group rituals are seen as significant (Edwards 2014). Russo and Amnå (2016) identify different personality traits and relate them to the likelihood of engagement. Briefly, and not necessarily applied to people in England, those who are agreeable and conscientious are perhaps less likely to take political action than those who are extravert and open to experience.

Several research projects including the National Foundation for Educational Research's Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (see https://www.nfer.ac.uk/research/projects/cels/) suggest that practical factors may be significant for individual and group engagement. These include, peer group advocacy, publicizing opportunities, an inclusive ethos, a welcoming physical environment, a willingness to deal realistically and honestly with issues that affect individuals and communities in contemporary society. In addition, youth workers who use high-level interpersonal skills to create a positive process of participation and maintaining realistic commitments for young people and the adults who work with them may determine the nature and amount of young people's engagement. There are mixed reactions to the motivational force of rewards (certificates, academic credit, work experience, salary, etc.), but it would seem potentially naively idealistic to ignore these matters (Davies et al. 2013).

For individual action there may be a range of facilitators. There are many (e.g., Byram 2008) who focus on the achievement of language as an essential indicator not only of identification but also of likely action. Acquiring language aids the functional aspects of citizenship (completing tax returns is perhaps a rather mundane example). It affects identity (it may be the case that I am what and how I speak), and it has a powerful impact on skills and dispositions (advocacy and representation are just some of the things that are achieved through language). The Linguistic Ethnography Forum (see http://lingethnog.org/) is devoted to exploring these issues. These issues and possible processes and outcomes about language have particular explicit resonance in diverse communities (e.g., see Szczepek et al. 2016) but are important in all communities insofar as language has instrumental value, is an aspect of culture into which and through which people are socialized, and is a form of social contract in which there are opportunities for democratic or other types of dialogue.

Social media are seen as having huge potential, but this is contested. There may be reservations about the positive potential for youth engagement (e.g., see Davies et al. 2012). Social media may not be available to all. Furthermore, it may be used in ways congruent with the development of democracy which may lead only to an emphasis on traditional teaching and learning styles. Despite the claims associated with social media use, there are strong critical accounts of what is happening to youth engagement as a result of new technology with some suggesting that less rather than more democracy is likely (e.g., Taplin 2017). Even in the context of widespread use, it is not apparent that the amount of usage is sufficient for social media to impact for all on global citizenship education. Therefore, there remains lingering questions regarding the ways in which social media are used as they may not necessarily be aligned with democratic citizenship and its educational potential is at the very least under-developed (Davies and Sant 2014).

Perhaps the most traditional form of civic engagement is voting. There have for many years been concerns expressed at low youth turnout at general elections. The debate in England has focused in recent years around the merits of allowing voting at 16. There is uncertainty about the wisdom of lowering the voting age (Stone 2017). Some feel that in relation to attempts to increasing turnout young people may "grow into" voting and that, in any case, not voting does not necessarily imply

disengagement. Politicians may want young people to vote to secure short-term electoral advantage (and to weaken young people's rights to receive state support). There may be a novelty value that would soon disappear (increases in turnout have been followed by decreases in, for example, the Isle of Man and Austria). Voting at 16 in light of rights held by young people in other spheres is seen by some as a spurious argument. For example, Russell (2014) sees those rights as "minimal, irrelevant, and diminishing," and he also claims that comparing young people in this context with women's campaigns for the vote or referring to changes to lifestyle regulation is inappropriate. What, however, seems clear is that the context for engagement is influenced by discussions over voting.

Making Explicit Connections Between Education and Youth Engagement

In general terms, there has been a strong connection made between education and an enriched civic culture. In their classic work that has been generally influential in many countries, Almond and Verba (1989 [1963]) suggest that:

> educational attainment appears to have the most important demographic effect on political attitudes. Among the demographic variables usually investigated – sex, place of residence, occupation, income, age, and so on – none compares with the educational variable in the extent to which it seems to determine political attitudes. The uneducated man or the man with the limited education is a different political actor from the man who has achieved a higher level of education. (pp. 315–316)

There are distinctions regarding levels of education in relation to civic participation. Campbell (2009) argues that an absolute level of one's own education (in other words, the value of education itself and not compared with that achieved by others) is relevant to membership in voluntary associations, institutional trust, and voting. But sorting (one's educational position relative to others) may also be important and when education is, at least in part, a status symbol this may be relevant to societies which experience political conflict. A cumulative effect (i.e., increases in the average level of education) is good for interpersonal trust and as a result a wide-based engagement may develop. Beyond these general considerations, there has been a large amount of research in England (complementing international studies) that make a clear connection between certain types of citizenship education and engagement (e.g., Ofsted 2010). Whiteley's (2013) research, for example, shows that:

> citizenship education had a positive impact on three key components of civic engagement: efficacy, political participation and political knowledge. This . . . is likely to help offset some of the trends in civic participation among young people which have shown a sharp decline in key activities like voting and voluntary activities over time. (p. 1)

Generally, education occurs when the two tenets of constructivism are met: "learning as an active process of constructing knowledge rather than [only] acquiring

it; and instruction is a process that involves supporting that construction rather than of [only] communicating knowledge" (Duffy and Cunningham 1996, p. 171). In order to apply that general insight to specific ideas and issues about citizenship education, it is interesting to look at research from the National Foundation for Education Research (https://www.nfer.ac.uk/research/projects/cels/) and reports from the Office for standards in education (OfSTED) (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/citizenship-consolidated-a-survey-of-citizenship-in-schools). Those reports suggest that effective citizenship education will be achieved by establishing a clear rationale and characterization of educational engagement widely understood by "teachers" and "learners," through explicit and focused consideration of key concepts, with recognition that certain areas (government, politics, and voting as well as diversity, identity, and global issues) present difficulties for teachers and learners, and with an appreciation that while assessment is difficult, good work may be achieved through open discussion in a positive educational "climate." There is less research on nonformal or informal forms of education for engagement but these surely are very relevant and worthy of further research. This means that despite all the very many debates in this field, we actually already know what to do and what not to do: education for engagement should not be narrowly academic, left to chance or constructed narrowly around morality (in the form of character education) or law (in the form of civics).

Conclusion

As in other countries, there are significant concerns and challenges about youth engagement and education in the English context. These challenges and concerns are long-standing. Since 2010 – a period which has witnessed the effects of the global financial crisis; General Elections in 2010, 2015, and 2017; and referenda about Scottish independence (2014) and membership of the European Union (2016) – England has experienced something of a revolution in education. Schools are now less supported by local government, have greater autonomy (e.g., most schools are now not required to follow the National Curriculum), and typically focus on a limited number of centrally imposed targets (principally maths, English, and science rather than citizenship). Officially, there is a perceived need for civic knowledge, greater discipline, and increased individual volunteering. Research and evidence from the schools' inspectorate about the value of citizenship education for civic engagement has been rejected by the government. Although the House of Lords is currently looking into the possibilities of reviving the educational focus on civic engagement (see http://www.parliament.uk/citizenship-civic-engagement), it is unfortunate that citizenship education in England has been characterized as being party political – essentially Labour Party – property and it is unlikely currently to regain its former prominent position.

The difficulties in the policy context for connecting education and civic engagement are significant. In many ways, England is witnessing a return to the period in the mid-1990s before the Crick Report when much of the key work was left to

interested professional and funding bodies and individual academics. But that does not mean that little work is taking place. Internationally, the Council of Europe, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (http://carnegieendowment.org/specialprojects/civicresearchnetwork/), and Leverhulme (as evidenced by their support for the project referred to in the acknowledgements below of this chapter) are promoting relevant work. There is a wealth of work in several countries taking place in which efforts are being made to understand the nature and types of engagement and their links with education. For example, Johnson and Morris (2010), Westheimer and Kahne (2004), and Veugelers (2007) divide citizens into the adapting citizen, the individualistic and/or the critical democratic citizen. There is exploration of the ways in which "new" technology may be shaped to provide the opportunities to move from the dutiful citizen to the self-actualizing citizen (Bennett 2008). In such a complex and contested field, interested parties need to continue to work to be clear about the meaning of key terms (while allowing for dynamic and flexible work). In addition, there is a need to pay attention to the context in which work takes place in order to review what seems to be relevant to the levels and types of engagement by young people and to see what is being done educationally, formally, and otherwise.

Cross-References

- ▶ Education for youth civic and political activism in Australia
- ▶ The development of active participation among youth in Singapore
- ▶ Constructions of 'youth' and 'activism' in Lebanon
- ▶ Young people's civic activism in Hungary
- ▶ Youth civic engagement learning and teaching in Canada

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