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Civic Activism, Engagement and Education: Issues and Trends

edited by

Ian Davies

Mark Evans and

Andrew Peterson

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Encouraging Classroom Discussion

Edda Sant-Obiols

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When Parents United: A Historical Examination of the Changing Civic Landscape of American Urban Education Reform

Esa Syeed, Pedro Noguera

Masthead

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Ian Davies, Mark Evans, Andrew Peterson

Civic Activism, Engagement and Education: Issues and Trends

Keywords

Education, activism, engagement, citizenship

1 Introduction

In this issue of the Journal of Social Science Education we explore the connections (explicitly or otherwise) between civic activism, engagement and education. We seek better to understand the educational outcomes of civic activism and engagement and the interplay between young people's involvement and the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes that allow active participation in civil society. Crucially, we are interested in identifying and highlighting the foci, forms, levels and pedagogical approaches that young people and their educators recognize as meaningfully encouraging critical and creative engagement with young people's civic activism and engagement. As such, we are concerned with 2 interlocking areas: the relevance of education to those who become actively involved in society and the educative role of activism to those who are so engaged. Simply, to what extent does civic education lead to

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activism and to what extent does the experience of activism educate? It is possible that these simply stated questions may reveal relationships between activism and education that are unidirectional and straightforward but we suspect that there will be significant uncertainties and complexities. We hope that this edition of JSSE will make a small contribution to clarifying some of the issues relevant to these matters.

When we started work on this special issue we were motivated by the desire to know more about the following key questions:

- What does civic activism and engagement mean to young people, professionals, policy makers and others in education?
- What foci, forms and levels of civic activism and engagement may be seen? Are there patterns across groups (related to age, ethnicity, social class etc.)
- What factors appear to support and/or hinder civic activism and engagement?
- What pedagogical/assessment approaches do young people and their educators recognize as meaningfully encouraging critical and creative engagement with young people's civic activism and engagement.

We certainly do not promise to provide answers to all aspects of these questions but we offer in this editorial and in the articles and book reviews some initial thoughts which relate to these matters. We hope that these discussions will help in the clarification of what might be done in collaborative research and development that we hope to pursue. We want to begin to lay the ground work for such work in this editorial by providing our brief overview of what needs to be considered and investigated in the field of civic activism, engagement and education and by summarising the articles that make up this edition of JSSE.

2 Characterising the fields of civic activism, engagement and education

We are keen to acknowledge the significant work on civic activism, engagement and education that has already taken place. This will be evident in the references throughout this editorial but we also wish to be explicit in our recognition of key pieces of work which include special issues of other journals (e.g. Kirshner, 2007) and



publications specifically devoted to these matters (e.g. Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010). We re-cognise the deep rooted nature of these matters and the value of classic statements about the relationship between activism, engagement and learning. John Stuart Mill noted that:

We do not learn to read or write, to ride or swim, by merely being told how to do it, but by doing it, so it is only in practicing popular government on a limited scale, that people will ever learn how to exercise it on a larger scale (quoted in McIntosh and Youniss, 2010, p. 23).

In these complex fields it is important for us to clarify the focus of our interests. Some have briefly stated the central issues. Hart and Linkin Gullan (2010) for example have suggested that “Youth activism refers to behaviour performed by adolescents and young adults with a political intent” (p. 67). This sort of brevity, however, is ultimately unhelpful. What is youth (is this to be solely to be determined by chronological age by years?); what counts as intent (how can intent be identified; is this to be seen as distinct from outcome; and, does it assume a direct link between cause or motivation and effect?); and, what is ‘political’ (would this include only constitutional and institutional matters, or is it cast much more broadly?) Our reflections about activism, engagement and education are strongly influenced by Crick’s thinking. In the 1970s in the form of political literacy (Crick and Lister, 1978) and in the late 1990s and early years of the 21st century (e.g. Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 1998; Crick, 2000) Crick applied many of his ideas to citizenship education. That educational work was preceded by reflection on the nature of politics (Crick, 1964). He explained in his classic defence of politics:

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).

A share in power is perhaps another way of describing activism and engagement. Through reflection on the work of Aristotle and others Crick seemed to come close to declaring politics to be a natural activity. It is doubtful that activism should be seen as being natural but it is perhaps possible to declare it as a normal part of society. Crick explained that “there is nothing spontaneous about politics – it depends on deliberate and continuous individual activity” (p. 23). In declaring opposition to the 2 great enemies of politics (indifference to human suffering and “the passionate quest for certainty in matters which are essentially political” (p. 160)) he makes a convincing case for engagement in vitally important issues. But it is perhaps always impossible to be precise and concrete about the nature of politics and, by extension, activism. Even the large and highly influential

body of work produced by Crick over such a long period of time cannot cover all the nuances of the nature of politics and its educational links. Indeed Crick himself resorted to forms of expression which seemed (depending on one’s position) as irritatingly obtuse or intelligently dynamic. Rather poetically, he praises politics as it allows one to find:

the creative dialectic of opposites: for politics is a bold prudence, a diverse unity, an armed conciliation, a natural artifice, a creative compromise and a serious game on which free civilization depends; it is a reforming conserver, a sceptical believer, and a pluralistic moralist; it has a lively sobriety, a complex simplicity, an untidy elegance, a rough civility and an everlasting immediacy; it is conflict become discussion; and it sets us a human task on a human scale. (Crick, 1964, p. 161).

More prosaically, we wish in this issue of JSSE to explore young people’s involvement in attempts to achieve change within their communities (whether local, national or global). Our focus incorporates participation in constitutional politics as well as less formal activity commonly associated with citizenship (i.e. social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy). By highlighting *civic* activism and engagement we are declaring an interest in young people’s involvement in the public sphere (Marquand, 2004, p. 27) as:

...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.

We characterise ‘civics’ as: incorporating specific contexts in which relevant issues are raised and around which activists mobilise; enjoying a conceptual underpinning in, for example, power, authority, justice; and emphasising the public and collective (without neglecting contributions of, or impacts on, individuals, and without failing to recognise personal engagement).

It is not possible to give a neat summary of what in light of the above is included in an overarching characterization of civic activism, engagement and education. However, it seems that the 4 elements given by McIntosh and Youniss (2010) will be useful in helping frame our considerations. We see activism as being something that is public, collaborative, arises from (and is an expression of) conflict and which takes place voluntarily. These things provide a useful, fixed point,



definitional statement but each of these elements and the overall position that emerges from the inter-connections between them are simply a springboard for further work. So, firstly, the simple dividing line between ‘public’ and ‘private’ matters which was often employed by Crick will not do. This is not only because academics now frequently declare that the gap between these things is disappearing in the light of for example uses of ‘new’ technology in citizenship contexts (Papacharissi, 2010). But this is also because narrow definitions of politics have – in part as a result of Crick’s influence – not been acceptable for some time. Crick declared differences between upper case ‘Politics’ (constitutional and institutional matters) and lower case ‘politics’ (power in everyday life). It would have been probably more politically shrewd if Crick had been quicker to acknowledge the fundamental role of ethnicity as a definitional construct in debates about citizenship. His preference for such overarching political concepts of justice, legitimation, power led to unhelpful debates about the nature of citizenship education. His late recognition of the power of ethnicity is in evidence in his foreword to Kiwan’s book (Crick, 2008). His explicit recognition of the significance of gender did not find full expression. The second and third areas highlighted by McIntosh and Youniss are collaboration and conflict are significant. As with the distinction between public and private these matters are not straightforward. Fülöp (e.g., Fülöp, Ross, Pergar Kuscer, & Razdevsek Pucko, 2007) has done a great deal of work in exploring the tensions – creative and otherwise – between those who are seen as co-operative and those who are regarded as competitive. The contexts that affect these actions are relevant and much of Fülöp’s work has taken place in countries that were once part of eastern Europe as well as in eastern Asian societies. The reliance by those who establish and engage in competition on agreed rules for processes and outcomes suggest that a collaborative element is essential in all contests. The ways in which people collaborate in order to gain competitive advantage has been discussed in various contexts (see Kirshner, 2007). Authors have explored these matters in some depth highlighting the role of collective behaviour in resource mobilization. Behind these actions lies a sense of dissatisfaction or a positive feeling about the chance to improve matters. And the perception of the nature of those who are deemed to have the power to change things is important. “A social movement develops when a feeling of dissatisfaction spreads and insufficiently flexible institutions are unable to respond” (della Porta & Diani, 1999, p. 6). Implied in the statements about such action, and so allowing us to approach the fourth of McIntosh and Youniss’ areas, is the role of the voluntary. Issues about volunteerism are extremely controversial. Huge amounts of attention have been devoted to the role of the volunteer. It is seen, variously, as a term which lacks meaning—certain types of activity (e.g. membership of groups such as the Boy Scouts) are seen as voluntary while other actions (e.g. young people

translating to help family members communicate with official bodies) are seen as required or as not of sufficient status to be seen as the actions of a volunteer. Crudely, someone helping at a seniors’ home for no pay is a volunteer; someone who chooses to work to supplement the family income is not. This is surely far too simplistic. Politicians have seemed, at least at first glance, to be guilty of contradictory statements when they call for young people to recognize their “voluntary obligations” (Hurd, 1989) but this makes sense for those in neo-liberal and nationalist contexts who cannot practically force people to do things but who nevertheless expect things to be done. The amount of attention devoted to service learning at a time when communitarianism and Confucian-inspired approaches to supporting others may be seen in many parts of the world. And yet issues of voluntary and compulsory activity are relevant to our concerns. It is unlikely that many will declare themselves to be activists after they have completed legally required compulsory voting. The will of individuals and groups to take part is what we are interested in. And we are aware that at points voluntary actions will complement the expectations of society and those individuals who see themselves as belonging to that society and so present us what seems to be in fact something that is required. But throughout we maintain that there are meaningful distinctions to be drawn and conclusions to be reached in characterizing activism as having something to be do with those things that are public, collaborative and conflictual and voluntary.

3 Understanding the field: what perspectives are brought to activism, engagement and education?

In our characterisation of civic activism, engagement and education above we, principally, discussed the nature of politics. That discussion was intended to show what is relevant to this special issue. But we now need to go further to show the perspectives that are used to understand not only the parameters within which the debates are held but also the perspectives from which the issues in these debates are viewed. This incorporates three things: the different traditions that influence the nature of a citizen (i.e., an activist in what may broadly be seen as a political context); the societal and individual factors that relate to levels and types of engagement in civic society; and the types of engagement themselves.

Firstly, we will discuss the nature of citizenship but we will do so briefly. This is not because the nature of citizenship—which is obviously a key feature of civic activism—is unimportant. Rather, in light of previous extensive consideration of that matter by the authors of this editorial and many others, we feel that it is appropriate here merely to summarise some key points. Essentially, the traditions of citizenship, at least in ‘western’ contexts, revolve around the liberal and civic republican traditions. Whereas the former emphasises rights in private contexts; the latter focuses on duties or responsibilities in public contexts. It is inadequate to assume that there is a simple dividing line between these



traditions, that they can be neatly pigeon-holed into left and right wing labels, that they are necessarily applicable to all parts of the world or that there is some sort of business-like trade-off between what we give and what we get from society. The linkages between the formal status of citizenship as shown in the issuing of a passport or other state sanctioned documentation, issues of identity and belonging and the actions undertaken on the part of oneself and others give rise to many complex considerations. But, at heart, the liberal-civic republican interface allows us to think about the perspectives that are pertinent to civic activism, engagement and education.

Secondly, it is necessary, if we are to understand the perspectives brought to civic activism, engagement and education, to consider what prompts involvement. This, very broadly, is debated in 2 ways: societally and in relation to individuals. Amnå and Zetterberg (2010) usefully discuss the role of 4 societal factors that are influential for involvement. Firstly, the nature of modernization may be important (as people become better off and better educated so they are more likely to want more of a say in public affairs). Secondly, there is the public institutional hypothesis (the design and performance of democratic systems may facilitate or hinder engagement). Thirdly, the social capital hypothesis may be significant (the connections between individuals facilitate or hinder engagement). Finally, there may be value for engagement in civic volunteerism (the resources available to people in the form of time, money and other things, the motivation that people have to be involved alone or with their friends, relatives and associates). These broad societal considerations, of course, apply to individuals but are not primarily cast in relation to those individuals. Or, perhaps another way of putting this is that Amnå and Zetterberg (2010) allow us to reflect on inter-personal or inter-individual matters whereas there is also a need to consider intra-personal and intra-individual issues. That latter focus is seen in the work of those who may see themselves operating from disciplinary perspectives including but also going beyond political science. This may be particularly noticeable in relation to those who have a recognizable psychological orientation. Sherrod, Torney-Purta and Flanagan (2010) argue that it is necessary to understand civic engagement as being conceptualized in multifaceted ways, that there is developmental discontinuity rather than smooth and consistent patterns of activity across the life span and that there are multiple developmental influences including cognition, the emotions and the impact of social contexts. This does not mean that we are unable to identify trends and patterns but rather that there is a need to be aware of the subtleties and nuances of the factors that relate to whether or not and how individuals and groups engage.

Thirdly, consideration of the types and purposes of engagement help us to understand more fully those things that are involved in the themes of this edition of JSSE. Sandel (2009) raises fundamental questions about

the work of Bentham, Kant, Aristotle, Rawls and others. The reflections on the nature of the good society and how to achieve it requires consideration of the possibility of utilitarianism (or, focusing on the greatest happiness of the greatest number), judging what is acceptable through a disinterested stance behind the veil of ignorance, and/or to declare that some things are in and of themselves better than others and worth attempting to secure. All these matters are intensely relevant to civic activism, engagement and education and lead almost directly to more concretely developed particular frameworks in which preferences are shown in fairly clear relief. Something of this may be seen in the way Johnson and Morris (2010), Westheimer and Kahne (2004) and Veugelers (2007) divide citizens into types of the adapting citizen, the individualistic and/or the critical democratic citizen and in the ways in which specific new developments such as 'new' technology are seen as providing the opportunities to move from the dutiful citizen to the self-actualising citizen (Bennett, Wells and Rank, 2008). It is then not a huge leap to empirical pieces of work in educational contexts in which people are seen to involve themselves in different ways for particular purposes. Weerts, Cabrera and Pérez Mejías (2014), for example, refer to 3 categories of college students who either "did it all" being highly engaged in multiple civic and pro-social behaviours; or, those who had a high probability of engaging in social activities; and, finally, those (the largest group) who were involved in professional, service, social, and community oriented organizations but not engaged politically. And this sort of distinction seems to us to lead almost seamlessly to the sort of literature that celebrates, is suspicious of, or denigrates the attempts by policy makers and others to introduce forms of education that are appropriate for the good society. Some of those many critiques may be seen in the work of Osler (2000), Biesta and Lowy (2006), Bryan (2012). The editors of this edition of JSSE have similarly contributed critiques and developed suggestions for what forms of education should be developed to promote civic activism and engagement. This issue is itself an indication of that continuing work. For such critique not to occur would be inconsistent with the aims of education for civic activism although for those who are not well disposed to engagement, or are currently less educated than others about it, there may be a feeling of dissatisfaction that clarity and consensus is not as easily achieved as trenchant position taking. It seems obviously the case that the focus on contemporary society which necessarily leads to the need for frequent curricular updating is also connected with a particularly explicit linkage (when compared with other aspects of education) with party politics and curricular issues in citizenship education with uncertainty and a consequent curious disjunction between acceptance that engagement is at the heart of all good education and that low status will be more likely the nearer and more directly one approaches that connection.



4 The 'location' of civic activism and engagement

Perhaps one of the most obvious ways of considering where we might see civic activism is in relation to physical space. That is not to say that activism will necessarily be limited by geographical boundaries and in the context of a globalizing world there are many who show increasing interest in cross border factors. Tarrow (2005) when discussing transnational activism has declared that: "there is more of it, that it involves a broader spectrum of ordinary people and elites and that it extends to a wider range of domestic and international concerns" (p. 4). The strength of national citizenship is, however, still very clear. Crick (2000, p.137) by quoting Arendt emphasised that "a citizen is by definition a citizen among citizens of a country among countries" and by so doing usefully highlighted the valuable role of a nation state in making concrete the nature and expression of rights and responsibilities and also embroiled himself in debates about the value of international and global conceptions of citizenships. It is possible that global citizenship is very different in its nature from national citizenship (Davies, Evans and Reid 2005). The activism that goes beyond national borders:

includes three interrelated trends: an increasing horizontal density of relations across states, governmental officials and nonstate actors; increasing vertical links among the subnational, national and international levels; an enhanced formal and informal structure that invites transnational activism and facilitates the formation of networks of nonstate, state and international actors (Tarrow, 2005, p.8).

The immediate expression of civic activism may be seen within schools. As well as raising issues about the relationship between subject based teaching and learning and other more general matters there are arguments about who becomes involved and what impact that activity has upon them. Taines (2012) has argued that youth activism for school reform holds promise as an intervention that reduces the incidence of alienation among urban students (p.79).

Comments have already been made above about the role of social media. It is important to consider the possibility that we are transcending place based conceptions of citizenship that go beyond institutional location, national expression and global characterization. But the debate is still raging about whether or not a traditional form of activism is developing more swiftly and involving more or different numbers of people, or whether we are witnessing a new form of activism. Questions about where activism occurs are not straight-forward (Davies, 2012 et al).

5 Who becomes a civic activist and what is their connection with education?

Very generally, the research literature (see Davies et al., 2013) suggests that there are various routes to engagement. Some may be driven by altruistic

tendencies, and/or a desire to develop specific skills and knowledge which may be used for future social and educational advancement. It is possible that a feeling of efficacy and ability to benefit from networks and individuals that make engagement a pleasant, and achievable reality.

Despite negative adult characterizations of youth (Carvel, 2008) there is evidence of young people's engagement and the beneficial effects of that. Of course, there are caveats that need to be considered. Taines (2012) has suggested that the opportunity to participate in school activism was more influential for students who were already integrated into school life and initially felt less acutely alienated (p. 53). It is possible that young people from disadvantaged communities do not engage as readily as those who are more privileged (Andrews 2009). But these arguments should be treated carefully. It is possible that some types of engagement are more legitimated than others and so this may hide activity. Further as Kirshner et al. (2003, p.2) suggest terms such as:

'cynical' or 'alienated' that are used to categorise broad demographic groups misrepresent the complexity of youth's attitudes towards their communities. Young people are often cynical and hope-ful, or both critical and engaged.

There are several good sets of recommendations already to hand (e.g. Mycock & Tonge 2014) and many of these things relate to neatly phrased guides for educators. Sharrod et al. (2010) for example have suggested that 6Cs (character, confidence, competence, connection, caring, contribution) are the things that educators could focus on. There are many good sources of advice (and these should be viewed carefully including the critical appreciation of those who suggest that people will become engaged as a result of a good general education—perhaps including dialogic and constructivist approaches—without the need for a specific focus on civic understanding or skills). McIntosh and Youniss (2010) usefully argue for situated learning, scaffolding and perspective taking and each of these areas is, obviously, contested and in need of detailed elaboration. There may well be stages associated with these things that help educators guide students to become skilled and effective activists while still adhering to their professional responsibilities in which education and not the achievement of a political goal is always the desired outcome. There may be a complex integration of cognitive and affective matters: surely a high degree of emotional intelligence is as necessary as other things in the context of educating for activism. This editorial is not the place to discuss all the very many elements associated with these guides. However, we wish to argue most strongly that these things need to be considered both from the perspective of citizenship education leading to activism and the process of activism being educational. This dual approach is under-researched.



There is some but very little relevant work. Keith Webb (1980) for example researched the educational processes taking place in an anti-nazi league. But in a well-known act of professional conclusion Robert Stradling (1987) gave up on political education in schools as he had come to feel that it was a matter that could only be approached by adults away from the hierarchical and non-democratic environments of schools.

6 Investigating civic activism, engagement and education

When we were planning this issue of JSSE we did not have a finely grained pre-determined view of what sort of articles we would accept. We provided some broad guidelines and were prepared to accept good work from wherever it came. But as well as the substantive issues associated with our central themes we also have interests in what sort of methods may be used to research the field. In our next section we summarise the articles that appear in this issue. It is possible to see in those articles a range of approaches. Consideration of these articles is a useful way to think about the methods that may be used in the future. Some may focus on quantitatively framed indications of activism, others on qualitative reflection on their experiences and expertise; some may focus on institutional, including school, settings while others may wish to go into communities; some may wish to form stages or at least schema in order to clarify the nature of what is being experienced over periods of time; the connections between demographic factors and current social and political issues may well be important; given the attention that has been devoted in citizenship education research to knowledge but also to 'climate' there may be opportunities for evaluations of specific programmes; the emotional, cognitive and social processes allow for different ways of doing research.

We look forward to the possibility of completing some of this work in the future but for the moment are content simply to describe the excellent articles that have been selected to appear in this issue of JSSE.

7 Summary of articles

We invited for this issue of JSSE articles from a variety of perspectives in and outside of schools; a range of countries within and beyond Europe; and covering issues that affect students of different ages. We made it clear that the focus of this issue will be education but that we would welcome theoretical and other material that allows for consideration of issues using insights from a range of academic disciplines and areas. We are delighted to present such strong and varied material. We provide below brief information about the articles that have emerged from what we like to think has become an international team of authors. We have loosely grouped the articles into themes but do not wish to suggest that the categories we have employed are any more useful than rather rough and ready labels that provide only one

way of framing the many ideas and issues that are presented by authors.

We have 2 articles that explore the understandings that young people have about participation. Edda Sant (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK) in her article 'What Does Political Participation Mean to Spanish Students?' explores a sample group of Spanish students' (aged 11-19) perceptions of political participation in society and discusses the implications of their views for debates and practices in citizenship education. The author suggests that most students value political participation in positive terms and that 'activist' students have a more optimistic view of the effectiveness of participation generally and, in particular, of newer direct forms of participation. In the article 'Realizing the Civic Mission of School through Students' Participation in School' Yan Wing Leung, Timothy Wai Wa Yuen, Eric Chi Keung Cheng, and Joseph Kui Foon Chow (Hong Kong Institute of Education) report that student perceptions suggest that students are rarely allowed to engage in important school matters, such as the formulation of school rules and discussion of school development plans. Their findings also reveal that schools are more inclined to inform and consult students rather than offer more fundamental forms of participation. The paper concludes that the current practice of students' participation in school governance is not nurturing active participatory citizens, particularly of a justice-oriented orientation, who are, according to the authors, urgently needed for the democratic development of Hong Kong.

There is a close connection between the work from Sant and Leung et al with our next article that focuses on the ways in which teaching can relate to civic activism. Fernando M. Reimers, Maria Elena Ortega, Mariali Cardenas, Armando Estrada and Emanuel Garza, (Harvard University, USA) have submitted their article 'Empowering Teaching for Participatory Citizenship: Evaluating the Impact of Alternative Civic Education Pedagogies on Civic Attitudes, Knowledge and Skills of Eight-grade Students in Mexico'. They discuss the importance of democratic citizenship education in Mexico's current political context by means of a study that investigates pedagogical interventions aimed to encourage civic learning in schools. In the study, an assessment is given of the impact of various pedagogical approaches (high quality teacher directed lessons in school classrooms, learning through community based action projects, and a hybrid of these two approaches) in the greater Monterrey area in 2008-09. An overview of the forms of intervention, participants, and details of the questionnaire (197 multiple option questions, some selected from the most recent IEA Civic Ed Study) are provided. All treatment groups had significant effects in a range of civic dimensions, such as conceptions of gender equity, trust in the future, knowledge and skills, participation in school and in the community. There is limited evidence of transfer of impact to dimensions not explicitly targeted in the curriculum. There is no impact in attitudinal dimensions, tolerance and trust.



We have 3 articles that focus on aspects of arts and performativity. Bronwyn Wood (Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand) and Rosalyn Black (Monash University, Australia) write about 'Performing citizenship: Educating the activist citizen'. They describe some of the ambiguities that attend young people's experiences of civic engagement and active citizenship. They draw on Isin's (2008) reconceptualization of citizenship as something that is, above all, performed or enacted and conclude by reflecting on the opportunities that exist within school and community spaces for the active citizen to perform acts of citizenship. Peter Brett and Damon Thomas (University of Tasmania) write on 'Discovering argument: Linking literacy, citizenship and persuasive advocacy'. They explore persuasive writing and what more might be done to help equip young people with the written literacy tools to be effective participants in civic activism. They analyse challenges that 14 year old students face in responding to Australia's national literacy tests which include a persuasive writing task, critically review the literacy strategies suggested in a representative citizenship education teaching text, and suggest a tentative stepped model for supporting high quality persuasive writing in the context of active citizenship and democratic engagement. Finally, in this section Jane McDonnell (Liverpool John Moore's University, UK) writes on 'Finding a place in the discourse: Film literature and the process of becoming politically subject', reporting on the role of the narrative arts in young people's political subjectivity and democratic learning. The paper discusses a number of findings from an empirical research project carried out with young people in two arts contexts and argues that narrative art forms such as literature, film and television play an important role in the ways the young people construct and perform their political subjectivity, and that this is an important part of their overall democratic learning. The implications of this for democratic education are discussed and the paper concludes with the suggestion that we need to rethink political literacy, civic engagement and democratic learning in aesthetic and imaginative terms.

We are pleased to include in our next group 3 articles that explore aspects of social media. Jennifer Tupper (University of Regina, Canada) writes on 'Social Media and the Idle No More Movement: Citizenship, Activism and Dissent in Canada'. She explores the ways in which the Idle No More Movement, which began in Canada in 2012 marshalled social media to educate about and protest Bill C-45, an omnibus budget bill passed by the Federal Government. The paper argues that Idle No More is demonstrative of young people's commitments to social change and willingness to participate in active forms of dissent. As such, it presents opportunities for fostering ethically engaged citizenship through greater knowledge and awareness of Indigenous issues in Canada, which necessarily requires an understanding of the historical and contemporary legacies of colonialism that continually position First Nations, Métis, and Inuit

peoples as 'lesser' citizens. Finally, the paper suggests that the example of Idle No More stands in contrast to the notion of a "civic vacuum" that is often used to justify the re-entrenchment of traditional civic education programs in schools and as such, can be used as a pedagogic tool to teach for and about dissent.

Frank Reichart (University of Bamberg, Germany) writes about 'The Prediction of Political Competencies by Political Action and Political Media Consumption'. He reports on a preliminary research study undertaken by the author that aims to show the relationship among, for example, engagement in political activities in the past, media consumption, and the implications for political competencies and engagement among students with and without a migration background in Germany. A variety of interconnected themes and variables are identified in the study including political competencies, political participation, political media consumption, civic responsibility, migration, structural political knowledge, and symbolic political knowledge.

Finally, in this section Erik Andersson and Maria Olson, (University of Skövde, Sweden) write about 'Political participation and social media as public pedagogy: Young people, political conversations and education'. They argue that young people's political participation in the social media can be considered 'public pedagogy'. The argument builds on a previous empirical analysis of a Swedish net community called Black Heart. Theoretically, the article is based on a particular notion of public pedagogy, education and Hannah Arendt's expressive agonism. The political participation that takes place in the net community builds up an educational situation that involves central characteristics: communication, community building, a strong content focus and content production, argumentation and rule following. These characteristics pave the way for young people's public voicing, experiencing, preferences and political interests that guide their everyday political life and learning—a phenomenon that we understand as a form of public pedagogy.

The final articles explore issues of wide ranging significance. The contribution by Esa Syeed and Pedro Noguera (New York University, USA) is titled 'When Parents United: Exploring the Changing Civic Landscape of Urban Education Reform'. They explore the shifting nature of public engagement in urban school improvement efforts and lessons learned from attempts to reform urban schools across the U.S. over the last decade. The paper considers two contrasting trends: new forms of engagement by private organizations (e.g. foundations, hedge funds, etc.) in reforming public education and the expanding role of civic groups in mobilizing urban communities to improve their schools at the grassroots level. In particular, the experiences of Parents United, a city-wide organization in Washington, D.C. active between 1980 and 2008 are examined to show how the civic landscape shapes opportunities for engagement and for educational decision-making. Generally, the paper contribute to our understanding of the



emerging civic landscape by demonstrating how public policies and institutional arrangements may support or limit opportunities for communities to participate in the reform process.

We also include 2 book reviews on relevant issues (reviewed by Gary Plum and Ian Davies).

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Edda Sant-Obiols

Encouraging Classroom Discussion

Classroom discussion has the potential to enhance the learning environment and encourages students to become active participants in the educational process. Student participation in classroom discussion has been shown to significantly improve the student learning experience. Research suggests that classroom discussion is an effective method for encouraging student classroom participation and for motivating student learning beyond the classroom. Participation in classroom discussion encourages students to become active collaborators in the learning process, while at the same time providing instructors with a practical method of assessing student learning. Classroom discussion is an effective tool for developing higher-level cognitive skills like critical thinking. Despite the potential discussion holds for student learning, many in academia lament the lack of participation in the classroom. The lack of student participation in classroom discussion is not a recent problem; it is one that has frustrated instructors for decades. Instructors report that some of the more current methods for encouraging classroom discussion can be exasperating and at times non-productive. This two-year study of 510 college and university students provides insight into the reasons why some students do not participate in classroom discussion. This study, which also elicited input from sixteen college and university professors and two high school teachers, offers some suggestions for creating and encouraging an environment conducive to student participation in the classroom.

Keywords:

classroom discussion, student assessment, student engagement, education, social science

1 Introduction

Classroom discussion has the potential to enhance the learning environment by encouraging students to become active participants in the educational process (Dale, 2011; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2010; Howard, Short, & Clark, 1996). Svinicki and McKeachie suggest that classroom discussion is an effective method for encouraging student participation and for motivating student learning beyond the classroom. King (1994, 174) asserts that students “learn more rapidly and retain knowledge longer when they take an active role in the learning process.” Goldsmid and Wilson (1980) encourage students to become active collaborators in the learning process, while at the same time providing instructors with a practical method of assessing student learning. King (1994:174) argues that classroom discussion is “superior to lectures in developing higher-level cognitive skills (e.g., critical thinking) and in changing students’ attitudes about course topics” (see also Taylor, 1992; McKeachie, 1978).

Despite the potential classroom discussion holds for student learning, many in academia lament the lack of student participation in the classroom (Hollander, 2002;

Eble, & McKeachie, 1985). The lack of student participation in the classroom is not a recent problem; it has frustrated instructors for decades (Gimenez, 1989). Even some of the more current methods for encouraging classroom discussion (e.g. multi-media) can be exasperating and at times non-productive (Magnuson-Martinson, 1995).

I have been teaching sociology for over twenty years and I have noticed that my upper division students—most of whom are social science majors—are generally engaged in classroom discussion when compared to my first-year students. One might assume that the diverse and often controversial subject matter that sociologists are concerned with would engender some strong opinions that students would be only too eager to share. Yet, over the years, I have repeatedly heard my fellow colleagues complain about the lack of student participation in classroom discussion.

Four years ago, I was approached by two graduate students who were in their first semester of teaching introduction to sociology. They were frustrated by the lack of student participation in the classroom discussion and came to me seeking advice. After offering a few suggestions, I decided explore the reasons why so many first-year students are reluctant to participate in classroom discussion. For this study, I surveyed 645 college and university students over a three-year period. I also discussed this problem with eighteen college and university sociology and psychology instructors. The single research question for both groups was: “Why do you think some students are reluctant to participate in classroom discussion?” In the process of gathering data, several of my colleagues offered techniques they use to

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increase student engagement, which I will share in this article. While most of the methods are not new or novel (I suspect many instructors are already using a variety of them), it is my desire that some of these techniques will be useful to those who are experiencing problems. I hope this article helps some instructors to recognize the impediments to student participation in their classroom and perhaps assist them in creating a welcoming environment that encourages student participation.

2 The Importance of classroom discussion

Some educators question the value of classroom discussion (Kelly, 2007); others recognize strong student resistance to the concept despite the instructor's best efforts (McFarland, 2004; Yon, 2003). However, student engagement in the classroom has been identified as a significant factor in determining student achievement (Kelly, 2008). Beyond test scores and grade point averages, classroom discussion provides an opportunity for personal enrichment. Many of our students may have had only limited social interaction with diverse groups prior to entering college (Lopez, 2007). The classroom, then, is an excellent setting for students and instructors alike to learn more about the diverse backgrounds and experiences of our students, as they also learn to appreciate and welcome diversity. For our students who may someday find themselves in positions of business ownership or management, learning to appreciate diversity in the classroom has the potential to translate into success in private industry (Herring, 2009). According to Herring, both gender and racial diversity are associated with increased sales revenue, and greater relative profits.

As social scientists, we are likely familiar with the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), which posits that through interpersonal social interaction diverse groups may come to dispel some of their preconceived prejudices (Beitin, 2008). Further research also indicates that intergroup conflict may be reduced through positive social interaction (see Forsythe, 2009). Diversity also has the potential to enhance a student's social network thereby increasing their access to relationships, including exogamous romantic interethnic relationships (Clark-Ibáñez, & Felmler, 2004.) Classroom discussion also helps students to see beyond their own preconceived notions on a host of social issues, thereby improving their critical thinking skills and opening them up to new ideas (Takanori, 2003).

Participating in classroom discussion can make the course more interesting for our students (Eglitis, 2010; Parrini, 2005; Unnithan, 1994). Classroom discussion is an excellent opportunity for instructors to learn something new and interesting as well (Bernstein-Yamashiro, & Noam, 2013). Students, particularly those who are a little older than our average students, possess a rich history that includes some wonderfully unique experiences (Howard, Short, & Clark, 1996). I have learned much from my younger students regarding the latest in urban slang, fashion, and technology. Sharing

these experiences helps to break down some of the barriers of communication between students and faculty.

Encouraging classroom discussion provides educators with alternatives to traditional lecturing as the primary method for conveying course materials. Prolonged lecturing can tend to bore many students, thus reducing the effectiveness of instruction (Augustinien, 2004; Brown, 1999). One of the main responses I solicited from students was that they were often bored by the instructor's regular insistence on long lectures. By encouraging classroom discussion students become active participants in the learning process (Howard et al., 1996). When students become an integral part of the class a secondary result is usually better attendance (Dale, 2011; Forsythe, 2009).

3 A growing problem

While encouraging classroom discussion has always been a challenge for educators (Alpert, 1991), I have heard a steady increase in complaints from my colleagues in recent years. In my conversations with other educators, they cited three sources as potential contributors to this problem: social media, classroom overcrowding; and homeschooling. The increase in social media may be responsible for reducing the number of opportunities for students to engage in meaningful face-to-face conversations, thus increasing the tendency for social isolation (Hampton, Sessions, & Her, 2011). In the process, they may fail to develop fundamental social interaction skills that lead to bonding with their fellow social actors (Conein, 2011).

Some have suggested that the problem may be rooted in the steady increase in classroom overcrowding (McCain, Cox, Paulis, Luke, and Abadzi, 1985). Because of large class sizes, students may become apathetic or feel lost in the crowd and therefore reluctant to participate in classroom discussion (Unnithan, 1994). Others posit that the problem may be related to the quality of classroom teaching and learning (Pedder, 2006). Weiner (2003) suggests that the deficit paradigm—the result of the student's negative social environment outside of the classroom—coupled with increasing class sizes, forces teachers to struggle just to maintain orderly classrooms where students come in, sit quietly at their desks and take notes (Schneider, 1998).

Several instructors I spoke with suggested that the lack of student participation may be traced to the increasing number of college students who were previously homeschooled. Their argument being that these students are not accustomed to large classrooms. They couple this with the fact that in most cases, homeschooled students are being taught by a well-meaning, but relatively unskilled parent, who lacks the experience of a seasoned professional. When being taught by a parent, students may be reluctant to engage in a discussion with someone who is an authority figure from whom they cannot escape after class is over. While it is true that the number of children being homeschooled has increased significantly in the last twenty years



(Isenberg 2007), I was unable to find any research that supported this suggestion. In contrast, the literature tends to suggest that homeschooled students may actually adjust and succeed quite well in the college environment, even surpassing the non-homeschooled students (Drenovsky & Cohen, 2012).

4 Methods and data

Using convenience sampling (Marshall, 1996), I gathered data from August 2011 to May 2014 by asking my introduction to sociology students (n=591) and upper-division students (n=54) one question: "Why do you think some students are reluctant to participate in classroom discussion?" I asked the same question to eighteen experienced college (n=10), and university (n=8) social science instructors. Eight of these respondents have actually taught for more than twenty years. Respondents were encouraged to list as many reasons as they thought appropriate. As a result, some responses were recorded in more than one category.

The data was coded and analyzed using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2008, 2006, 2000; see also Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and sensitizing concepts (Bowen, 2006; Blumer, 1969, 1954). While open-ended questions are subject to a variety of interpretations based on the context of the response (see LaRossa, Jaret, Gadgil, & Wynn, 2000), I believe it is possible for me to make reasonable and valid assumptions about the meaning(s) of the responses and to create appropriate categories based on my interpretation of those responses (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Typologies were constructed from key words or phrases expressed as by the respondents as noted in italics. In many cases the actual category was used by the respondent.

My analysis of the students' responses yielded three general categories: *disengaged instructor*, *intimidation*, and *lack of preparation* by instructor. A disengaged instructor is one whom students feel is boring, lacks passion, or does not care about either the subject matter or whether students learn anything from the course instruction. As one upper-division sociology student remarked:

Half of my professors act like they are just there to talk about themselves. *They don't care about me as a student or if I am learning anything.* It is not uncommon to see students fall asleep in many of my classes while the professor drones on about something.

Intimidation includes those students who feel intimidated in the classroom, either by the instructor or by other students, as these two sociology majors indicate:

I think many students do not speak up in class partly due to *fear of being wrong* and partly because they are not prepared to have a dialogue with *an authority figure who presumably knows more than they do.*

There are a lot of instructors out there that aren't open to a real discussion. If you are not in agreement with them you open yourself up to ridicule and perhaps a lowered grade.

The category for *lack of preparation* captures those responses where students reported that the instructor was ill-prepared to teach the class. Here is what one upper-division student said:

Many of my instructors are actually graduate students. *Some of them don't even have any notes or PowerPoint slides.* They just read from the book or jump around so often in their lectures that I don't know what they are talking about. Then they get angry when they ask the class to discuss the material and no one speaks up.

Fifty-three percent of student respondents said they feel intimidated in the classroom, either by the instructor or by other students (n=342). In these cases, the instructor has not created a welcoming environment for students to participate in the discussion. Approximately thirty-three percent of student respondents said that the instructor was disengaged (n=213). Thirteen percent of students responded that the instructor was either not properly prepared to teach the class (n=84). One percent (n=6) said that the instructor never offered an opportunity to participate in the classroom discussion. "She would just come in and start talking," one student replied. "If you raised your hand, she would just ignore you and keep on talking."

The instructors' responses were synthesized into three categories: *student apathy*, *intimidation*, *lack of preparation* by student. Approximately forty percent (n=7) of instructors cited student apathy as this instructor noted:

Ambivalence, lack of engagement, *apathy*, disaffection, growing up realizing they could pass classes in school without talking much, disregard for what the professor thinks of them. It also has to do with the declining respect for the profession.

While this response was coded as "apathy" other responses were not coded into a single category. Because respondents were permitted to provide numerous answers, some responses were marked in two or more categories. For example, this response was recorded in all three categories: *apathy*, *intimidation*, and *lack of preparation*.

Fear of saying something dumb or incorrect (*intimidation*). Not paying attention in the first place/don't care (*apathy*). Don't want to give other students the impression they are a know-it-all (*intimidation*). Can't read and don't understand what we are talking about (*lack of preparation*).



Instructors cited intimidation as the top reason for the lack of student participation (n=12). While two anthropology professors acknowledged that students were most likely intimidated by the instructor, the rest of this group cited intimidation from their fellow students. Only four instructors felt that students failed to participate in the classroom because the student was unprepared, despite many of them offering the opinion that most students were normally unprepared for the day's instruction.

6 Discussion

I found a general reluctance by both groups to take ownership of the problem. Each group tended to blame the other. When I informed instructors that a third of the student respondents said they were bored in the classroom, most reacted with surprise or disdain. One social psychology professor stated: "Hey, I am not here to entertain students. I am here to teach them. I had to put up with some pretty boring instructors when I was in college; it is just part of the college experience." However, another longtime sociology professor likened classroom teaching to stand up comedy. "You have to entertain your students by injecting humor into your lectures," he said. "Get to know your students so you know what things they are interested in and what pushes their buttons." When I pressed students to elaborate on why they found some instructors to be boring, most replied that the instructor lacked passion for the subject or seemed disengaged. Many remarked that the instructors' lectures would drone causing students to lose interest in the subject. Others said that some instructors just don't seem to care whether they pass or fail, or whether students were even learning anything.

More than half of the student respondents reported that they often feel intimidated in the classroom. Many said that there is always at least one student in class who dumps on everyone else's opinions. Others cited the unfortunate experience of having an instructor who force-fed them his or her opinion on social issues and then made students feel stupid for disagreeing with them. A few students complained about the class "know-it-all;" who has his or her hand raised at every occasion, thus reducing the opportunity for other students to participate in the classroom. This psychology major's response was fairly typical of those voiced by other students:

Many students don't talk because they feel uncomfortable talking in a public setting. They don't want to come across as "stupid" or say the wrong thing and offend the instructor or another student.

Thirteen-percent of student respondents reported that the instructor did not appear to be prepared to teach the course. Students stated that some instructors fumble through their notes or jump around between topics so often that they found it difficult to follow the instruction. One student stated: "I had this professor last

semester—a graduate student—he would just open the book and start reading from the chapter. He would flip back and forth through the pages without making any sense." Another student replied that she had an introduction to psychology instructor who "would spend the entire class period telling stories about her life and never seemed prepared to teach the class. The bad part was that we all failed her exams because we never knew what to expect."

One surprising response came from two white students, a brother and sister, who stated that they were homeschooled until entering a local high school where they were in the racial minority. They feared participating in classroom discussions involving racial issues because they had several bad experiences as a result of voicing opinions that were contrary to what a black or Hispanic student had said. Now they find themselves in a social science class where topics of race or social class are in the forefront, they carry with them the same fear and trepidation instilled in them from their abusive high school experiences (see Hyde & Ruth, 2002).

While intimidation ranked high with instructors, forty percent reported that students are apathetic about their education. As the quote below reflects, some instructors lamented that students are not really interested in getting an education.

They are only there to mark off another box on their required list of courses so they can graduate. *They don't really care about the subject matter; they just want to pass the course and move on.*

Among those instructors who cited intimidation, several suggested that status differentiation may play a role in determining whether or not a student feels comfortable in participating in the classroom discussion, as this psychology instructor notes.

Power/status dynamics between student and peers, and student and teacher are significant. A student with higher status/higher level of acceptance among peers, may be more confident to contribute if contributing is a value in the school culture.

My data suggests that much of the problem with classroom discussion may be the fact that instructors have not created a welcoming environment for student participation. Students are feeling intimidated in the classroom, either by the instructor or their fellow students. Some instructors have failed to recognize the importance of student involvement in the course, while others are frustrated by their attempts to engage students in the classroom discussion.

7 Creating a welcoming environment

The study data indicates that if we are to encourage classroom discussion, we must communicate to our students that participation in a social science classroom is an expectation and not an exception. We must create

an environment for them to feel safe in expressing their views. We also have to find ways to keep our students interested and engaged in what we are teaching them (Brown, 1999; Singleton, 1989). If we are not passionate and enthusiastic about what we are teaching our students, how can we expect them to be? Course materials should be introduced in a manner that is both current and relevant to their lives (Rafalovich, 2006; Sobieraj & Laube 2001). Students learn best when they can relate a particular concept or idea to their own experiences (McCabe, 2013). The following are a few suggestions from me and my colleagues that have proven effective in increasing student participation in the classroom, particularly among first-year students in our social science courses.

One technique is to prepare a discussion question in advance of a lecture. At the appropriate time, present the question to the class and allow them two minutes to discuss the question among themselves. Follow this up by asking students to share their comments regarding the discussion question. For example, in a discussion of race and ethnicity, I like to ask my sociology students to identify the stereotypes commonly associated with their racial or ethnic group. This exercise is an opportunity for minority students to express their frustrations concerning stereotypes and provides a forum for dispelling them as hurtful and false.

Several instructors reported that they show students a funny video clip from one of the many online video sites that relate to the topic of the day. I show students in my social science research methods course a humorous video on breaching. Aside from providing a few minutes of comic relief, the video has spawned numerous breaching exercises for my students to practice on campus. After which, we regroup and spend the remainder of the time discussing their experiences. Another technique is to relate a particular concept to a current event. One of the major advantages social science instructors possess over other instructors is that we are directly involved in current issues of social significance. Recently I spoke to my first-year sociology students about social inequality and how it connects to conflict theory. I related it to the failure of Congress to pass legislation that would lower the interest rates for student loans. I implied that members of Congress are generally wealthy and their children don't need student loans. By making a college education more difficult or unattainable for the lower socioeconomic classes, members of Congress assure themselves that their children will not have to compete with them for the best colleges and jobs, thereby reinforcing social inequality.

A longtime sociology professor told me he likes to play the devil's advocate with his students. He said, "When I am discussing the culture of poverty thesis versus white privilege, I like to play the video of Bill Cosby talking about how blacks are responsible for their own problems and need to quit blaming whites." He said that this video never fails to get students excited and it provides an

opportunity to introduce a host of concepts related to racial and ethnic relations.

The second issue to address is that of classroom intimidation. My research suggests that a large percentage of first-year students do not participate in classroom discussion for a host of reasons: classroom bullies, overly-opinionated instructors, or the fear of being politically incorrect. It is important for instructors to stress upon their students proper classroom etiquette (Emerick, 1994; Singleton, 1989). I tell students that classroom discussion is not an opportunity to: 1) upstage the instructor; 2) dominate the conversation; 3) denigrate another student's opinion; or 4) for an instructor to embarrass a student.

As social science instructors, controversial topics are an everyday part of our curriculum. We should respect students who may disagree with our personal or political opinions. Regardless of our education and experience, we should never force our personal or political opinions on our students. It is normal for many first-year students to feel a little intimidated by the instructor. When I call attendance on that first day, I ask them to tell the class something interesting about themselves. To get the ball rolling, I tell them that I was once on the old television show *The Newlywed Game*. And in fact, I liked that particular wife so much, that I married her twice. This usually gets a chuckle from the class and it has the effect of humanizing me in their eyes. By being self-effacing, we can lower the pedestal to the point where students feel comfortable expressing their opinions in our presence. Humor in the classroom can be an effective tool for advancing knowledge and increasing student participation (Wunder, 1990; Hynes, 1989; Korobkin, 1988).

The onus for improving student participation, however, does not fall entirely on the instructor. Students have a responsibility to come to class prepared to discuss the course material. One method for ensuring that students have completed the required reading is to have them prepare a one-page summary of the readings for that day. This assignment will prepare them to participate confidently in the classroom discussion.

Another technique I use is to require students to prepare a five minute presentation on the subject of the day, which includes a discussion question. Over the years, former students have told me that this particular exercise helped them overcome their shyness.

8 Conclusion

Encouraging classroom discussion is a positive learning tool for those of us engaged in teaching the social sciences, but it only works when we create a welcoming environment for student participation. If we can help students develop this important skill, it will serve them well throughout their college and professional careers. By engaging in classroom discussion, students and instructors alike will learn much more than just the course materials. They will also find ways to make those materials and the courses more interesting and more relevant in their everyday social lives.



The college classroom should be a welcoming environment for students to express their opinions and to share their life experiences. Encourage your students to become active participants in the learning process. Assure your students that they are in a safe place to discuss their views on a variety of potentially controversial topics. Discourage dictatorial, dogmatic, or threatening behavior, including that of our own doing. Teach students proper classroom etiquette enforce those rules when it becomes necessary. Remind students that classroom discussion is not only an expectation, it is a requirement. Make it clear that their grade is dependent on their participation. Be specific as to how much class participation is worth in your class. Put it on the syllabus and reinforce this regularly. Develop and implement methods that will assure students are coming to class prepared to discuss the relevant subject matter of the day.

I hope this modest study proves helpful to those of you who may be struggling to get your students to participate in the classroom. If I have overlooked something that has worked well for you in the past, please feel free to pass it along.

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Is Student Participation in School Governance a “Mission impossible”?*

The civic mission of schools in nurturing political literature, critical thinking and participatory citizens has always been played down in Hong Kong schools. On one hand, teaching civic education has never been ranked high in the education agenda. On the other hand, because of the conservative nature of schools, students are rarely encouraged to participate in school governance for the enhancement of their citizenship development. Funded by the General Research Fund (GRF) in Hong Kong, the authors conducted a quantitative survey on students' participation in school governance and their citizenship development in 2013 to explore 1) students' conception of “good citizens”; 2) the level and scope of student participation in school governance; and 3) the facilitating and hindering factors influencing student participation. This paper is a report on the simple statistical results of the survey findings. With reference to Westheimer and Kahne's typologies, the findings revealed that the students had an eclectic understanding of citizenship, with higher scores for Personally Responsible Citizen and lower scores for Participatory, Justice Oriented and Patriotic Citizen, reflecting a conservative orientation. Concerning the implementation of school civic mission through student participation in school governance, it was found that students were rarely allowed to engage in important school matters, such as formulation of school rules and discussion of the school development plan. Our findings also revealed that schools were more inclined to inform students and consult them rather than confer real participation and powers to them. The paper concludes that the current practice of student participation in school governance does not facilitate the nurturing of active participatory citizens, particularly of a Justice Oriented nature, and this is urgently needed for the democratic development of Hong Kong.

Keywords:

School civic mission, civic education, students' participation, school governance, school-based management

1 Introduction: Citizenship and civic engagement

Citizenship is ideologically framed and is affected by the worldview in which it is embedded (Howard & Patten, 2006). Citizenship of Liberal Individualism orientation emphasizes individual citizens' rights while citizenship of Communitarian orientation stresses citizens' obligation and participation. On the other hand, the Republican notion of citizenship brings to the forefront civic virtues

such as patriotism and courage etc. In this paper, an eclectic orientation is adopted and Oldfield's (1990) notion of a citizen as “a member of political communities, with legally conferred rights and responsibilities, associated civic identities, virtues and participation” is followed. Noteworthy is the fact that contemporary discussion of citizenship has transcended the narrow confines of national boundaries as the political communities involving civic engagement should be more broadly defined. This is in line with the realities of a globalized world. Thus, Heater (1990) pointed out that the different civic identities a citizen now confronts comprise different levels: local, national, regional and global.

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) argued that discussion of citizenship and civic education programmes are about ‘what good citizenship is’ and ‘what good citizens do’, with implications for the conceptions of good society, which are controversial. As a corollary, “typologies of citizens” have been developed to help conceptualise the orientations of civic education (Banks, 2008; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). A typology is a classification scheme, which idealizes distinctions, makes boundaries artificially clear and provides analytical power and precision (Parker, 2003). Since these typologies are idealized representations, they rarely exist in pure form and they tend to appear in eclectic presentations in reality. The Westheimer and Kahne's typology is chosen for discussion in this paper because the ideas of Justice Oriented Citizen in the typology is important in Hong Kong given the recent struggles against various forms of

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social and structural injustice. The typologies can indeed help reveal the evolution of civic education in Hong Kong effectively (Leung, Yuen, & Ngai, 2014).

1.1 Westheimer and Kahne's typology

Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) typology of 'citizens' outlines three different conceptions of citizens: the Personally Responsible Citizen, the Participatory Citizen, and the Justice Oriented Citizen. A Personally Responsible Citizen acts responsibly, works and pays taxes, obeys laws, volunteers to lend a hand, and upholds such virtues such as honesty, integrity, self-discipline, responsibility, and obedience. A Participatory Citizen is an active member of the community who helps organize community actions to care for the needy. He knows how the government works, and how to adopt appropriate strategies to accomplish collective tasks. He values trust, solidarity, active participation, leadership, and community collaboration. The difference between a Personally Responsible Citizen and a Participatory Citizen is that the former emphasizes individual and personal work, and tends to stay away from politics; while the latter emphasizes participation and collective work, which would be more political. However, both conceptions may not be critical to the status quo, tend to avoid controversial issues, and tend to stay within the boundaries of laws and regulations. Hence, such citizens can be politically conservative with the former even inclined to being apolitical. In stark contrast with the previous two, a Justice Oriented Citizen critically assesses the status quo and the current social, economic and political structures. He seeks to address structural injustice from a critical perspective and knows how to use political mobilization to achieve systemic change to address the injustice. He may even confront the boundary of law and convention through civil disobedience if necessary. Westheimer (2008) argued that character traits in different conceptions of citizenship may be in conflict with each other. For example, loyalty and obedience, which are valued by a Personally Responsible Citizen can be 'harmful' towards a Justice Oriented Citizen, particularly if they are emphasized out of the right proportion. Leung, Yuen & Ngai (2014) found that most school civic education programmes, even those found in mature democratic nations like the USA (Westheimer, 2008), Canada (Llewellyn, Cook, & Molina, 2010), Australia (Howard & Patten, 2006) and the UK (Kiwani, 2008), tend to avoid politics and not many have reached the level of Justice Oriented Citizen. It seems that the civic education in most educational systems, including those under democratically elected government, tend to avoid confronting the status quo and structural injustice. Hence, they would prefer not to cultivate Justice Oriented Citizen and such oriented civic education programmes are generally not encouraged.

In the context of Hong Kong, programmes inclined towards Personally Responsible Citizen stress the attributes of a "good person", including obeying law and order, school rules and discipline, as well as doing the

best in one's role and caring and providing voluntary service for people in need. Programmes inclined towards Participatory Citizen emphasize leadership training, cultivating student leaders to organize, plan, lead and serve. Usually these two types of civic education programme come together. Whilst programmes relating to Personally Responsible Citizen and Participatory Citizen are well established, those relating to the Justice Oriented Citizen that asks students to examine critically the status quo to correct possible injustice are underdeveloped (Leung, Yuen & Ngai, 2014). Similar to civic education found in many Asian countries, Hong Kong's civic education is also charged heavily with the responsibility of instilling a sense of national identity, loyalty to the nation state and patriotism (Leung & Print, 2002). Hence, the conception of Patriotic Citizen is added to this study as the fourth conception in addition to Westheimer and Kahne's typology. Putman (1998) defines patriotism as the quality of loving one's country. Pullen (1971) distinguishes between the meaning of patriotism in a democracy and patriotism in a totalitarian state. In a democracy, the individual is loyal to several groups (church, clubs and schools etc.) and idea systems that enrich his way of life, which add up to loyalty to the nation that respects all these institutions and the allegiance they command. On the other hand, in a totalitarian system, the government attempts to destroy all intermediate forms of loyalties so that the individual loyalty is in the hands of the state. The idea of a "critical patriot" as one who loves his nation with an open and critical mind and is willing to work for the betterment of his nation critically is adopted (Fairbrother, 2003; Leung, 2007). This typology of the four conceptions of citizens will guide the present study.

1.2 Education for civic engagement

It can be seen that civic participation or engagement is emphasized in all four types of citizenship. It follows that it is important for civic education to provide opportunities for students to learn and master such civic qualities as attitudes, skills and knowledge so that they can be active participators. Transforming civic knowledge into civic action is then a key aspect of citizenship education (Dudley & Gitelson, 2002; Galston, 2001, 2003, 2004; Westheimer & Kahne, 1998). Hence, liberal democratic societies generally perceive that the ultimate goal of citizenship education is to prepare students for active citizenship which is deemed beneficial to society (Kennedy, 2006, quoted in Nelson & Kerr, 2006; Ross, 2007; Ross & Dooly, 2010; Sherrod, 2007; Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

2 Civic mission and student participation in school governance

Although citizenship education for active citizenship can be implemented through different means, schools remain critical vehicles. Schools have plenty of opportunities to make an impact on students' civic learning. In



fact, democratic countries consider it a school obligation to develop among young people the democratic spirit, preparing them as politically literate, participatory, and critically thinking citizenry a school obligation. This is sometimes called the 'civic mission of schools' (Dürr, 2004; Leung et al., 2014). In order to achieve this mission, a whole-school approach, composed of both teaching and practicing aspects, has been recommended. This includes teaching and learning within and outside the classroom and involves both the formal and informal curricula. Assor, Kaplan and Roth (2002) and Reeve et al. (2004) reported that when student autonomy within the classroom is encouraged, there are higher levels of student engagement. Research has also revealed that civic education programmes adopting active pedagogies, particularly those involving open classroom culture which facilitates discussion of controversial issues, expression of tolerance, mutual respect for differences of opinion and support of social justice, often correlate with attitudes and competence that have the potential to foster active citizenship (Blankenship, 1990; Ehman, 1980; Hess, 2001; Nemerow, 1996; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Porter, 1983; Print, 1999; Print, Ørnstrøm, & Nielsen, 2002; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001). Experiential learning and service learning, especially those emphasizing political dimensions and social justice, have also been reported as effective in fostering active citizenship development (Leung, 2003; Mooney & Edwards, 2001; Robinson, 2000).

As for the practical aspects, schools can be considered as a miniature political community. Accordingly, the civic learning of students is achieved through participation in school governance, particularly decision-making in the perceived meaningful issues in schools (Leung & Yuen, 2009; McQuillan, 2005; Taylor & Percy-Smith, 2008). In this paper, 'school governance' is broadly defined as encompassing "all aspects of the way a school is led, managed and run (including school rules, procedures, decision-making structures), and the behaviour of its personnel and how they relate to each other" (Huddlestone, 2007, p. 5). The idea is that what is taught about citizenship, particularly active participation, must be practised and experienced in schools. If not, the perceived contradiction may lead to cynicism, alienation, and apathy. Indeed such contradictions contribute to the failure of many civic education programmes (Osler & Starkey, 2005; Raby, 2008; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000; Schimmel, 2003; Tse, 2000). That is, in order to ensure the teaching and learning of citizenship is successful, students should be encouraged to engage actively in the governance within the school communities. Students are empowered through their participation in decision making in important school matters. In this conception, schools have been described as 'laboratories of democratic freedom' (Bäckman & Trafford, 2006) and 'crucibles of democracy' (McQuillan, 2005).

2.1 The rationales for student participation in school governance

The involvement of students in school governance, which may be termed as "democratic school governance" or "participatory school governance" (Huddlestone, 2007, p. 5), has well-supported ethical, educational and instrumental justifications. From an ethical point of view, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), especially Articles 12 and 15, have explicitly laid down the rights of a child to express his or her views freely and to be heard on all matters that affect him or her, and the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly. It calls for treating students as 'here and now citizens' in the school communities, and endorsing their rights and responsibilities in influencing the matters that affect them (Leung & Yuen, 2009; Roche, 1999). In terms of education, participation is positively related to impact on the students such as in general attainment, heightened self-esteem, sense of belonging, self efficacy, and responsibility (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2009). From an instrumental perspective, the participation of students is positively related to improving school discipline, teacher–student relationships, attitudes towards school, and making the school more competitive (Bäckman & Trafford, 2006; Dürr, 2004). All these educational and instrumental benefits may have direct or indirect positive impacts on students' citizenship development. Literature has also revealed that the different styles of student participation in school governance may result in different modes of citizenship, such as becoming passive or Justice Oriented Citizen (Ho, Sim, & Alviar-Martin, 2011; Rubin, 2007; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

2.2 Forms, scopes, factors and results of student participation

Student participation in school governance can take different forms (Hart, 1992; Tsang, 1986). Similar to the idea of forms, Dürr (2004) suggests seven levels, moving from the bottom towards the top: "basic information and passive reception of decisions", "contribution of some sort, either resources or materials", "contribution through attendance at meetings and through labour", "involvement in designing strategies or planning programmes", "co-operation with others in carrying out programmes", "consultation on the definition of problems and preparation of decision making processes", and "participation in decision making, initiation of action, implementation of solutions, and evaluation of outcomes".

Concerning the scope of student participation, UNCRC Article 12 emphasizes that all matters affecting the child are relevant in the consideration. Scholars have argued that scope should go beyond student-related issues and extend to the wider aspects of school life, and the community (Fielding, 1997; Hannam, 2001; Tsang, 1986). For example, Dürr (2004) outlined the following classifications: "Participative Structures", "Participative Learning", "Participation in the Social Life of the School";



and "Participation Beyond the School." However, in reality, schools tend to narrow the scope of participation, giving an impression of tokenism (Tse, 2000).

Facilitating factors for students' involvement in school governance have also been identified. They comprise, *inter alia*, the level of confidence of students in the values of participation, a sense of empowerment in their school, the existence of student representative structures, opportunities for students to be respected for their contribution to solving school problems, the extent to which the school environment models democratic principles or fosters participation practices, an open classroom climate for discussion, and a link with the wider community and participatory organisations beyond the school (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). The idea of a 'democratic ethos' shared among members of the communities, comprising mutual trust and respect, is another crucial factor (Radz, 1984; Trafford, 2008). Leadership, including student leadership, and in particular, the principal's leadership, in encouraging participatory governance (civic leadership), is another important factor (Dimmock & Walker, 2002; Hannam, 2001). Inman and Burke (2002) have identified as important the willingness of the school authority to take risks, to facilitate others in taking leadership, its commitment to the good of children, and to involve the school in the wider community.

3 The civic mission and civic education in schools in the Hong Kong context

Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan city where liberty is cherished and where historically Eastern culture has encountered Western culture. After being a British colony for over a century, it was returned to China in 1997 as Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), in accordance with the Sino-British Joint Declaration (1984). Since Hong Kong's capitalist economic system contrasts starkly with the socialist system upheld in Mainland China, the principle of 'One Country, Two Systems' has been applied with the effect that the social and political system of China, including that of a planned economy and democratic centralism etc., will not be implemented in Hong Kong. This allows Hong Kong to retain its structure and the existing way of life with a high degree of autonomy. To prepare for self-rule, a representative form of government has been developed in Hong Kong.

In order to prepare youths to face the new political landscape, the *Guidelines on Civic Education in Schools* (The Curriculum Development Council CDC, 1985) and the *Guidelines on Civic Education in Schools* (The Curriculum Development Council CDC, 1996) were published in 1985 and 1996 respectively. After the handover in 1997, several official documents relating to moral and civic education have been published. The *Learning to Learn* (The Curriculum Development Council CDC, 2001) is an important example in this case. The most drastic event relating to civic education after the handover was that from mid-July to September 2012,

where mass gatherings and street demonstrations took place in response to the decision by the government to replace moral and civic education by a compulsory subject entitled Moral and National Education. The popular movement, sometimes involving more than 100,000 people at a time, forced the HKSAR to shelve the mandatory Moral and National Education and revert to a school-based civic education in October 2012.

Notwithstanding these developments, civic education in Hong Kong is in reality not much more than a "lip service" (Leung & Yuen, 2012b). It is moralized and depoliticized, where the teaching content is maintained as politically conservative as possible and, whenever convenient, the political content can be replaced by moral education at will. There is indeed a tug of war between the urgent need of cultivating a democratic culture for Hong Kong's democratic development and the wish to keep Hong Kong as a depoliticized financial and business centre by the Chinese Central Government (Leung & Yuen, 2012a, 2012b). However, it can be discerned that the need of cultivating a democratic culture for Hong Kong's democratic development has never been paid much more than just lip service. The civic mission of nurturing politically literate, participatory, and critically thinking citizens with civic qualities is seriously marginalized. It is against this backdrop that the present paper is written. Although implementing civic mission in schools involves both teaching and practising, this paper focuses solely on the practical aspects, particularly student participation in school governance.

4 Student participation in school governance in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, schools in general tend to be conservative, authoritarian, paternalistic and not encouraging of student participation in school governance (Tse, 2000). In order to pave a path leading to decentralizing the administrative power to schools, the Hong Kong Government introduced the School Management Initiative (SMI) in 1991, which was designed to encourage management reforms in Hong Kong aided schools (EMB & ED, 1991). The SMI was premised on a school-based management model, which gave schools greater control over their finance and administration, and made them more accountable to the public. In 1997, the SMI was modified and became a non-mandatory School Based Management (SBM). In order to encourage more schools to participate, the former Education Department made further changes to the policy in September 2000, providing extra grants and more flexibility. The school management boards and principals can make a difference through their values, beliefs, and vision, to meet the needs of their students. Thus with the launch of SBM, school governance can in principle be more flexible, and introducing the participatory element into school governance has become possible.



5 The General Research Fund Project

This paper is an initial report of the first phase of a General Research Fund (GRF) project by the HKSAR government, entitled “The Civic Mission of Schools: Citizenship Education, Democratic School Governance and Students’ Participation”, which will take place over a period from July 2012 to June 2015. This research study brings together two areas of substantive concern: civic education and school governance. The study focuses on the impact of student participation in school governance on their citizenship development, an area hitherto under-researched in Hong Kong. In the area of civic education, many works have been done on concepts of citizenship, curricula, teaching and learning of citizenship education. However, little research has been conducted on the relationship between citizenship and participation in governance (Leung & Yuen, 2009). The work of Leung & Yuen (2009), Tse (2000) and Yuen & Leung (2010) are a few exceptions. On the other hand, in the area of school governance, researchers have studied the relationships among school leadership, effectiveness, improvement, and the impact of leadership on student achievements (Krüger, 2009). Notwithstanding, little study has been conducted on how governance is related to the civic mission of schools and democratic/participatory citizenship (Bush, 2003; Davies, 2005). This research study attempts to fill the gap and widen the scope of study in both areas.

The overarching research questions of this project are, with the introduction of SBM, (1) to what extent does school governance support a student participatory culture in schools in the Hong Kong context, and (2) whether and how school governance with student participation can contribute to the nurturing of participatory citizenship?

Being a preliminary report of a part of the quantitative study of the GRF research project, this paper addresses the following specific research questions:

RQ1. What are students’ understandings of good citizenship?

RQ2. What are students’ perceptions of civic mission of their own schools?

RQ3. From the students’ perspective, how is the school civic mission implemented through their participation in school governance?

6 Research methodology

A cross-sectional quantitative survey was designed to collect data from Secondary 2 (aged about 13) and Secondary 5 students (aged about 16) from 51 secondary schools in Hong Kong. These students represented junior and senior students in the sample schools. Secondary 1 students were not chosen as they were less familiar with the school. Secondary 6 students were omitted as they were busy preparing for public examinations. There are around 460 Hong Kong secondary schools. A sampling size of 11% (n=51) of the total population of schools (N=460) was drawn up to assist in the selection of

schools for the survey of students. Two classes in each school – one secondary 2 class and one secondary 5 class were sampled randomly after negotiation with the schools. Ethical approval was granted by the ethics committee of the Institute. School principals provided informed consent. 3209 students from 51 secondary schools responded to the questionnaire.

Data were collected directly from students by means of a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire contained seven sections to measure firstly the students’ demographical background and their perceptions on the following:

1. good citizenship (Table 2);
2. school efforts in nurturing good citizenship (civic mission) (Table 3);
3. school policy on their participation in school governance (Table 4);
4. the scope and forms of participation in school governance (Tables 5 & 6);
5. the facilitating and hindering factors for their participation (Table 7); and
6. their participation through Students Council (not detailed in this paper).

In order to develop valid items for the pertinent scales, the researcher conducted a content analysis from various significant international researches, such as, CivEd (Torney-Purta et al., 2001), CivEd - upper secondary (Amadeo, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Husfeldt, & Nikolova, 2002), NFER (2010) (Keating, Kerr, Benton, Mundy, & Lopes, 2010) and ICCS(2009) (Schulz et al., 2009). Taking into account the local context, an instrument of 65 items was developed (See Table 1.)

Table 1. List of scales adopted by the instrument

Scale name	No of scale(s)	No of items
Good citizenship	4	17
School efforts in implementing civic mission	1	5
School policy on students’ participation in school governance	1	6
Scopes of participation	2	9
Forms of participation	Not applicable	10
Facilitating and hindering factors for their participation	3	18

Participants indicated their response to the above statements on a four-point Likert scale. Likert scales are commonly used in attitudinal research. The Likert scale assumes that the difference between answering “agree strongly” and “agree” is the same as answering “agree” and “neither agree nor disagree” (Likert, 1932, quoted in Gay, 1992). In this study, “strongly disagree”, “disagree”,

“agree”, and “strongly agree” were coded as “1”, “2”, “3” and “4” for calculation.

Confirmatory factor analysis and reliability tests were employed to confirm construct validity and internal consistency of the instrument. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to examine the factor structure of the “students’ perception of good citizenship” instrument and to tap into the underlying constructs of the four variables. Factors with eigenvalue >1 will be extracted. Reliability was examined on the basis of quantitative procedures to determine the degree of consistency or inconsistency inherent within this instrument. Principal axis factoring (PAF) analysis with Promax rotation was used to select the items in data reduction by using the SPSS program, while Cronbach’s α -reliability measure for internal consistency was utilised to test the reliability of the derived scales. Reliability was examined on the basis of quantitative procedures to determine the degree of consistency or inconsistency that was inherent within this instrument.

7 Findings

As this paper focuses only on three specific research questions (RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3), we will discuss the findings of the items in the questionnaire relating to the specific research questions (expressed as 'Qn') under the following headings: “students’ perceptions of good citizenship” (Q1), “students’ perceptions of their school efforts in nurturing good citizenship (civic mission)” (Q2),

“students’ perceptions of general school policy on student participation in school governance” (Q3), “the scope of students’ participation in school governance” (Q4), “the forms of students’ participation in school governance” (Q5), and “the predictive factors for student participation” (Q10, 11).

7.1 Students’ perceptions of good citizenship

In addressing RQ1, Table 2 which displays the data for questionnaire Q1, illustrates the factor structure of students’ perception on citizenship. The 17 descriptions of a good citizen are conceptualized into four factors. They are: Personally Responsible (mean = 3.43), Justice Oriented (mean = 3.00), Participatory (mean = 2.97) and Patriotic (mean = 2.75) Citizen. As discussed, the first three factors were based on Westheimer and Kahne’s typology, while the fourth factor was developed with reference to the specific situation in Hong Kong. These results reflect that students agreed that these four elements constitute the core characteristics of a good citizen. That is, students had an eclectic understanding of the conception of “good citizenship” (Leung, 2006). Among these four characteristics, Personally Responsible Citizen and Patriotic Citizen stood out as the most important and the least important characteristic of a good citizen respectively.

Table 2. Students' perceptions of good citizenship (Q1)

Scale	Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Mean	
Patriotic	1	loyalty to the country	.820			2.78	
	2	identification with the country	.810			2.71	
	3	respect of government representatives	.768			2.81	
	4	loyalty to the ruling party	.743			2.28	
	5	interest in the country's constitution, constitutional structure and legal structure	.723			2.92	
	6	interest in the country's current situation and development	.681			3.08	
Participatory	7	participate in community activities		.800		2.87	
	8	organize voluntary services such as visiting elderly homes		.777		2.93	
	9	participate in voluntary work protecting the environment		.680		3.13	
	10	vote in elections		.626		2.96	
Justice Oriented	11	pursue an understanding of human rights, the rule of law and justice			.790	3.17	
	12	analyze social and political issues critically			.710	3.18	
	13	voice out for unjust social issues			.631	3.08	
	14	willing to use mild physical conflict to fight against law violating human rights			.599	2.57	
Personally Responsible	15	obey the law				.801	3.53
	16	possess appropriate moral behaviour and attitude				.781	3.48
	17	hand in valuables found in the street				.663	3.27
Eigenvalue		5.960	2.470	1.418	1.062		
% of Variance Explained		35.056	14.527	8.339	6.246		
Scale Reliability Cronbach's Alphas Coefficient		0.869	0.831	0.743	0.740		
Scale Mean		2.75	2.97	3.00	3.43		
Standard Derivation		0.797	0.733	0.753	0.628		



7.2 Students' perceptions of their schools' effort in nurturing good citizenship (civic mission)

In addressing RQ2, Table 3 which displays the data for questionnaire Q2, illustrates students' perceptions of the efforts made by their schools in nurturing good citizenship (i.e. the school civic mission). In general, all students agreed that nurturing them to be good citizens is an important school mission (item 1, mean = 3.00). The students tended to agree that their schools put adequate resources in nurturing good citizens (item 3, mean = 2.75) and cultivated an atmosphere that values nurturing students to be good citizens (item 2, mean = 2.91). However, the students only tended to slightly agree that their schools had set up a committee or task force (item 5, mean = 2.66) and organized civic education activities (item 4, mean = 2.66) to nurture good citizens. These findings may reflect that an implementation gap has existed between the civic mission to nurture good citizens and implementation plans for civic education activities of their schools.

Table 3. Students' perceptions of their school efforts in nurturing good citizenship (civic mission) (Q2)

		Mean	SD
1.	Nurture students to be "good citizens" is one of my school's important missions	3.00	0.653
2.	The overall atmosphere of my school values nurturing students to be "good citizens"	2.91	0.674
3.	My school puts adequate resources in nurturing "good citizens"	2.75	0.713
4.	My school always organizes activities related to nurturing "good citizens"	2.66	0.742
5.	My school has a unit specifically for nurturing "good citizens"	2.66	0.738

7.3 Students' perceptions of general school policy on student participation in school governance

Addressing RQ3, Table 4 which displays the data for Q3, illustrates students' perceptions of general school policy on student participation in school governance. In general, all the students agreed that their schools allowed them to express opinions on issues relevant to them (item 1, mean = 3.01). Almost all the students agreed that their schools allowed them to participate in school governance that helps nurture students to be active participatory citizens (item 2, mean = 2.89) and to raise students' sense of belonging to their school (item 3, mean = 2.93). They tended to agree that their schools encouraged them to participate in school governance (item 4, mean = 2.74) and they participated in school governance actively (item 5, mean = 2.71). However, the data indicated that they only slightly agreed that their school provided adequate channels for them to participate in school governance (item 6, mean = 2.61). These findings may reflect that a gap has existed between student perception on schools' support for

student participation and the actual channels provided by schools to student participation in school governance.

Table 4. Students' perceptions of general school policy on student participation in school governance (Q3)

		Mean	SD
1.	My school thinks that students have the right to express opinions on issues related to them	3.01	0.711
2.	My school thinks that allowing students to participate in school governance helps to nurture students to be active participatory citizens	2.89	0.735
3.	My school thinks that allowing students to participate in school governance helps to raise students' sense of belonging to the school	2.93	0.750
4.	My school encourages students to participate in school governance	2.74	0.812
5.	Students in my school participate actively in school governance	2.71	0.791
6.	My school provides adequate channels for students to participate in school governance	2.61	0.832
Scale reliability Cronbach's Alphas Coefficient = 0.880			

7.4 The scope of student participation in school governance

Table 5: The scope for student participation (Q4)

	Scale	Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Mean
School Management	1	school's development plan	.845		2.29
	2	formulation of school rules	.840		1.98
	3	school's self-assessment	.755		2.43
	4	teaching and learning design	.736		2.39
	5	school facilities	.675		2.50
School Operation	6	class activities		.764	3.08
	7	design of notice board of student clubs		.763	3.34
	8	extracurricular activities		.693	2.97
	9	arrangement of catering		.488	2.62
Eigenvalue			3.944	1.512	
% of Variance Explained			43.819	16.798	
Scale Reliability Cronbach's Alphas Coefficient			0.86	0.67	
Scale Mean			2.32	3.00	
Standard Derivation			0.933	0.847	

In addressing RQ3, Table 5 which displays the data for questionnaire Q4, illustrates the factor structure of the scope of student participation in school governance. The scope of participation is categorized into two domains:

managerial policies and school operational activities. The level of participation in the operational domain (mean = 3.00) is much higher than those in the school managerial domain (mean = 2.32). The above result appears to suggest that student participation is only limited to an operational level on trivial affairs that are related to student activities.

7.5 The forms of student participation in school governance

In addressing RQ3, Table 6 which displays the data for questionnaire Q5, illustrates the forms of student participation in school governance. The students tended to agree that their schools informed them of the decisions of school policies (mean = 2.78) and provided resources to them to implement school decisions (mean = 2.65). However, they tended to disagree that their schools consulted them about the formulation of school policies through any existing channels (i.e., mean score of item 3 to item 10 are less than 2.5), except through the channel of the student council (mean 2.93) These findings reflect that in the students' perception, student council was the only consultation channel for student participation in school governance.

Table 6: The forms of student participation in school governance (Q5)

		Mean	SD
1.	School informs students about decisions on school policies	2.78	0.858
2.	School provides resources for students to implement schools' decisions	2.65	0.831
3.	School consults students about formulation of school policies through the channels below:		
	i) Class Council	2.48	0.996
	ii) Student Council	2.93 ¹	0.889
	iii) Prefect	2.44	0.960
	iv) School's opinion box	2.25	0.930
	v) Express opinions directly to the Principal or staff	2.33	0.926
	vi) Democracy Wall	2.07	0.980
	vii) Special Committees, such as Catering Committee	2.06	0.925
4.	School invites student representatives to participate in meetings relating to school governance	2.23	0.903

7.6 Predictive factors for student participation

In addressing RQ3, Table 7 (next page) which displays the data for questionnaire Q10 and Q11, illustrates the factor structure of predictive factors, both facilitating and hindering, for student participation in school governance. The 18 descriptions of factors are categorized into three latent factors. They are: facilitating factor (mean = 2.62), hindering factor (school) (mean = 2.57), and hindering factor (students) (mean = 2.52). It should be noted that all hindering factors are negative statements.

8 Discussion

8.1 The students' understandings of good citizens

To address the first research question "what are the students' understandings of good citizenship?", with reference to Westheimer and Kahne's typologies, the findings revealed that the students had an eclectic understanding of citizenship, with higher scores for Personally Responsible Citizen and lower scores for Participatory, Justice Oriented and Patriotic Citizen, reflecting a conservative orientation.

It is not surprising that being a Personally Responsible Citizen is considered by the students as most important given that there has been a persistent drive by the Hong Kong Government both before and after 1997 to pursue a depoliticized and moralized civic education, which avoided discussing controversial issues (Leung, Yuen & Ngai, 2014). In addition, many civic teachers in Hong Kong treat civic education as moral education in a private sphere (Leung & Ng, 2014). Such oriented civic education may lead to a conservative and apolitical form of "good citizens". By contrast, it is quite surprising to find that Justice Oriented Citizen ranked second, though the mean was just 3.00 compared to the relatively high score in the Personally Responsible Citizen category (3.43). Indeed, as indicated by the literature, civic education programmes aiming at Justice Oriented Citizen are seldom encouraged even in democratic states. This may be the result of many recent social movements attempting to address perceived issues of injustice in different areas like the Anti-national Education Movement and Occupying Central Movement. These social movements were organized against the backdrop of a conservative civic education (Leung, Yuen, & Ngai, 2014). Participatory Citizen (2.97) ranked third, slightly lower than Justice Oriented Citizen and can be traced to the emphasis on social service and voluntary work both by schools and by the education system which consider these as important elements in a student's profile.



Table 7. Facilitating and Hindering factors for Student Participation (Q6).

Scale	Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Mean
Facilitating factor	1 School has open and liberal attitudes toward student participation in school governance	.853			2.54
	2 School has a transparent and clear procedure for formulating school policies	.824			2.50
	3 School has a tradition for students to participate in school governance	.811			2.43
	4 School has a culture of mutual trust between school and students	.805			2.67
	5 Students believe that school accepts their opinions	.803			2.53
	6 School has formal channels to collect students' opinions, such as Student Council	.724			2.80
	7 Students believe that their participation in school governance is valuable	.604			2.83
Hindering factor (school)	8 Staff worry that the authority of staff will be challenged		.814		2.44
	9 Staff worry that there will be chaos in school policies		.799		2.52
	10 Staff lack enthusiasm		.760		2.28
	11 Staff lack training and professional knowledge		.715		2.24
	12 School worries about the reduction in efficiency of decision making		.715		2.53
	13 School worries about the increase of workload of staff		.712		2.42
	14 School lacks resources		.602		2.59
Hindering factor	15 Students lack interest to participate			.786	2.61
	16 Students' level of maturity and ability are inadequate to participate in school governance			.746	2.34
	17 Has negative impact on students' academic results			.668	2.23
	18 Students think that they do not have the right to influence school governance			.546	2.75
Eigenvalue		5.022	4.094	1.484	
% of Variance Explained		27.901	22.742	8.244	
Scale Reliability Cronbach's Alphas Coefficient		0.895	0.868	0.700	
Scale Mean		2.62	2.57	2.52	
Standard Derivation		0.804	0.820	0.802	

What was most puzzling was that scores for Patriotic Citizen ranked the lowest, given that the HKSAR government has worked assiduously to promote patriotism. Degolyer (2001) commented that when Hong Kong was promised self-rule, it was based on the condition that Hongkongers would love both Hong Kong and China. However, while Hongkongers may have a post-modern form of cosmopolitan identity, patriotism, in mainland China's conceptions, is closely related to ethnicity and the defeat of imperialism. Yuen and Byram (2007) argued that the difference had to be addressed for a harmonious co-existence. Regrettably, this consensus building has never been carried out. The unpopular attempt by the HKSAR government to enforce in schools the compulsory subject of Moral and National Education, in which the notion of patriotism only mirrors that as being promoted by the mainland authority and brushing aside beliefs upheld by Hongkongers, only led to massive resentment and protest in 2012. This may be the underlying reason for the low scores achieved in the Patriotic Citizen category in our study (Leung, Yuen, & Ngai, 2014, in press).

8.2 Students' perceptions of their school efforts in nurturing good citizenship (civic mission)

To address the second research question "what are the students' understandings of civic mission of schools?", students considered that nurturing them to be good citizens is an important mission of their schools (Table 3, item 1, mean =3). However, a closer look at the results of the survey revealed that students' agreement levels tapered off once the mission translated into implementation. The agreement level to schools putting adequate resources to nurture good citizens dropped to a mean value of 2.75 (Table 3, item 3). When asked whether schools set up specific units (Table 3, item 5) and organized activities for nurturing good citizens (Table 3, item 4), the agreement level dropped further (mean=2.66 respectively). In particular, the effort of schools to establish a specific civic education unit, which is crucial for the implementation of civic mission, had only improved slightly compared to similar findings carried out in 2001, which found only 39% (out of 163 respondents) of secondary schools had established such



a unit (Ng & Leung, 2004). We can tentatively call this as a perceived implementation dip.

There can be different explanations to the phenomenon and in-depth case studies are required for confirmation. Granted we cannot rule out the possibilities that schools fail to make explicit efforts to achieve the civic mission. However, students may not have sufficient knowledge about their school's structure and plans since the findings are based on students' perceptions alone, distorting the results. It is also plausible that schools are mainly paying 'lip service' (Leung & Yuen, 2012b) to their civic mission. This is indeed understandable given that civic education plays no important role in Hong Kong's education system which by tradition is largely geared towards the preparation of students for public examinations. Further, not many teachers have been trained to work with the civic mission in mind. These, together with the worry that civic education can be politically sensitive, have in fact plagued the development of civic education since the release of the first civic education guidelines in the 1980s.

8.3 The implementation of civic mission through student participation in school governance

Another interesting feature was spotted when we revealed the students' feedback given to the third research question, "from the students' perception, how is the school civic mission implemented through their participation in school governance?" Students showed more agreement about their schools' dedication to allow them participation in school governance. The mean score for "my school thinks that students have the right to express opinions on issues related to them", for instance, has a mean score of 3.01 (Table 4, item 1). The overall mean for all related questions has a mean over 2.6 (Table 4, items 2-6) against 2.5 (the mid score).

However, if we review students' perception about the scope of student participation in their schools (Table 5), all items relating to school management scored below 2.5, with the item "formulation of school rules" as the lowest (item 2, 1.98). The only exception to this is item 5, "school facilities" which scored 2.5, a mere pass. On the other hand, all items relating to school operations had mean scores over 2.5, with "design of notice board of student clubs" and "class activities" being the highest (3.34 (item 7) and 3.08 (item 6) respectively). We can tentatively conclude from these scores that schools tended to provide channels for students' participation in school operations only on a micro level and in implementation within the broad policy framework already made by the school authority. It may not be far from truth to say that schools are not inclined to involve students in decision making of a more political nature. School rules, which define the limits of student freedom and hence the powers of schools, for instance, was rated the lowest in all items (item 2, mean = 1.98). Why schools are less willing to allow students to partake in more major decision making that affects the balance of

powers can be considered from perspectives like confidence in student qualities, age and maturity, as well as education traditions. However, these assumptions can only be confirmed with further researches, particularly those of an in-depth and qualitative nature.

Looking at the findings with regard to students' perception about "the forms of student participation in school governance" (Table 6), we can see that those items passing the 2.5 mean score are "student council" (Item 3 ii, 2.93), "school provides resources for students to implement schools' decisions" (Item 2, 2.65), and "school informs students about decisions on school policies" (Item 1, 2.78). Informing students and providing resources for students to implement school decisions certainly do not constitute sharing of powers. Student councils in Hong Kong schools often serve as only a consultative body and work heavily under teachers' supervision. On the other hand, we should note the possibility that schools may not be prepared to adapt to a more bottom-up approach in consultation. "Democracy wall" and "expressing opinions directly to principal or staff" both scored below 2.5 (Item 3, vi. 2.07 and Item 3, v. 2.33). More substantial involvement in decision making was rated low. "School invites student representatives to participate in meetings relating to school governance" was rated at 2.23 (Item 4) while "special committees, such as catering committee" was rated at 2.06 (Item 3 vii). Thus, our findings support the notion that schools are more inclined to inform students and consult them through formal channels, rather than sharing powers with them. Indeed, Durr (2004) argued that participation in school matters is often limited at the bottom level of the participatory ladder such as being informed, delegated with resources to implement decisions made by the schools, etc.

In discussing the facilitating and hindering factors (Table 7), it should be noted that all hindering factors are negative statements. From the data, the common factors identified from literature, such as, "school has open and liberal attitudes toward student participation in school governance" (item1), "school has a transparent and clear procedure for formulating school policies" (item 2) and items 3,4,5, are relatively non-conspicuous, with mean scores around 2.5. The most important facilitating factor was "students believe that their participation in school governance is valuable" (Item 7, 2.83). This finding may imply that students would be motivated to participate when they believe that their participation involves meaningful issues in school (Taylor and Percy-Smith 2008). The second highest facilitating factor was "school has formal channels to collect students' opinions, such as Student Council" (item 6, 2.80), implying that students expected schools to provide formal channels for them to actualize their participation. Contrary to the literature (Hannam, 2001) which argued that encouraging and supporting leadership are needed for student participation, "staff lack enthusiasm" (Item 10, 2.28) and "staff lack training and professional knowledge" (Item 11, 2.24) were not considered as important hindering factors



in the eyes of the students. This is an interesting point which further researches can consider. One quite unexpected finding was that though achieving good academic results is among the most important objectives in Hong Kong's education system, the item "has negative impact on students' academic results" did not show itself as a significant hindering factor comparably (item 17, 2.23). This may reflect the view that participation is positively related to impact on the student such as in general attainment, heightened self-esteem, sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and responsibility (Schulz et al., 2009).

9 Conclusion

The study of this paper is based on a General Research Fund (GRF) project entitled "The Civic Mission of Schools: Citizenship Education, Democratic School Governance and Students' Participation". It adopts a mixed methodology comprising both quantitative and qualitative methods. This paper reports only part of the findings of the survey by questionnaires to students.

In addressing the first research question with reference to Westheimer and Kahne's typology of citizenship, the study reveals an eclectic understanding of the conception of "good citizenship". Personally Responsible Citizen was considered by the students as the most important form of citizenship and this may be related to the persistent drive by the Hong Kong government before and after 1997 to pursue a conservative civic education. Though this kind of citizenship may fit the purposes of governance, to keep Hong Kong as a depoliticized financial and business city, it does not match the urgent need of cultivating a democratic culture for Hong Kong's democratic development (Leung & Yuen, 2012a). It is quite surprising to learn that Justice Oriented Citizen, which is more "radical" than Personally Responsible Citizen, ranked second. This may be the result of many recent social movements attempting to address perceived issues of injustice in Hong Kong society. The cultivation of Justice Oriented citizens has been raised as a pressing agenda in the nurturing of democratic culture, for the democratic development of Hong Kong (Leung et al., 2014). Participatory Citizen ranked third and this can be traced to the emphasis on social service and voluntary work both by schools and by the education system for leadership training. Patriotic Citizen ranked the lowest despite the HKSAR government's tireless efforts to promote patriotism. This may reflect that Hongkongers' idea of patriotism does not correspond to that of the Chinese mainland.

In addressing the second research question, there appears to be an implementation dip in the perception of the students about the civic mission of schools. Agreement level of the students was higher when they were asked whether their schools consider nurturing good citizens as an important mission. The agreement levels fell when it related to resources, specific civic education units being established, and having organized civic education activities. Whether this reflects the failure of schools by paying lip service to civic mission or doing so

in an inconspicuous way unnoticed by students, the distorted results based only on students' perceptions remains to be explored.

In addressing the third research question on implementing schools' civic mission through student participation in school governance, our findings revealed that schools were more inclined to inform students and consult them through formal and controlled channels, for example, Students Union strongly led by teachers, rather than real participation and sharing powers with them. As for the scope of participation, far from what the UNCRC Article 12 recommends that all matters affecting the students' school life should be involved, student participation in school governance was limited to mainly trivial operational matters, or implementation within the broad policy framework already made by the school authority. According to students' perceptions, "students believe that their participation in school governance is valuable" and "school has formal channels to collect students' opinions, such as Student Council" were the two most important contributing factors for their participation. It is surprising to find that "having negative impact on students' academic results" did not show up to be a significant hindering factor in the competitive, examination oriented context in Hong Kong education.

The unwillingness of the schools to share power with students was reported by Tse (2000), while Gallagher (2008) explained that schools do not really encourage real student participation. There is at best tokenism, at the bottom of Hart's (1992) ladder, "instead of 'real participation' at all (p. 404)". It seems that the identified practice of student participation in school governance does not facilitate the nurturing of active participatory citizens urgently needed for the democratic development of Hong Kong. Instead, this may result in passive citizens (Ho et al., 2011; Rubin, 2007; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Perhaps the rectification of the unwillingness of schools is the key to student participation in school governance, which is empowering students' citizenship development for the nurturing of a democratic culture.

We would like to stress that the initial findings have portrayed a picture of "limited" student participation in general. This initial conclusion echoes our initial analysis of official policy and curriculum documents on civic education in Hong Kong, which will be detailed in future publication. The official policy and curriculum documents focus on the teaching and learning of civic education and rarely mention student participation. Without policy support, this may imply that the advocacy of student participation in school governance in Hong Kong is long and winding though may not necessary a "mission impossible". (Tse, 2000) In conclusion, we would like to remind the readers that this paper only reports the preliminary results from the questionnaire surveys conducted with students. It is limited by the fact that the findings reveal only the perception of students which may be biased and may not necessarily reflect reality. The findings need to be triangulated with similar views of



other stakeholders like teachers and school leaders. Besides, the quantitative data generated from the questionnaire survey lead to different tentative explanations which need to be probed further, for example, through in-depth qualitative interviews. These would be covered in later phases of our study. Further, our study also suggests that there needs to be more research efforts in different areas relating to student participation in school governance, such as the role of student councils, attitudes of school staff, as well as the readiness of students to partake in governance etc. However, we would also like to stress that though the preliminary results are only perceptions, which may be distorted and not necessarily reflect reality, they have to be addressed seriously because the perceptions may become students' "constructed reality", shaping their behaviours.

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Endnotes

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¹ Student councils were rated relatively highly by students possibly due to its conspicuous nature and the fact that there are usually formal election processes in the choosing of student councils. It is another question whether student councils in Hong Kong participate in important decision making of the schools. However, this paper will not detail the findings on student council.



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Empowering Teaching for Participatory Citizenship: Evaluating the Impact of Alternative Civic Education Pedagogies on Civic Attitudes, Knowledge and Skills of Eight-grade Students in Mexico

In spite of the fact that public schools were established to prepare students for citizenship, the alignment of teaching practice with this goal is poor. In part, this is because the knowledge base about the efficacy of curricular and pedagogical approaches in supporting specific civic outcomes is limited, as is our knowledge about the extent to which civic learning is constrained to pedagogical objectives specifically taught vs. the generalizability of what is learned to other civic outcomes. In this paper we evaluate the impact of three interventions aimed at training teachers to use a specific pedagogical approach (i.e. lesson planning, participatory learning, and a combination of both) to teach civic education to low-income eight-grade students in Nuevo Leon, Mexico. These pedagogies aimed at improving teacher practices used to teach the civic education curriculum and fostering a specific set student's civic skills. Using data from a cluster randomized experimental design at the classroom level, we found positive impact of the three civic education pedagogies on teacher practices reported by students. We also found statistically significant impacts on a range of students' civic dimensions explicitly targeted by the curriculum. Finally, we found limited or no evidence of transfer of effects to civic dimensions not explicitly targeted in the curriculum.

Keywords:

Civic Education, citizenship education, participatory education, student empowerment, democratic education, project based learning, service learning, cluster randomized experiment

1 Introduction

The need to equip all people with civic competencies is one of the foundational ideas of the public school. In democratic societies, it is generally expected that students will learn at school to develop agency and autonomy, a sense of control, self-efficacy and responsibility over their lives, and the capacities to come together with others to address problems of common concern and to participate politically.

An extensive body of scholarship reflects this long standing purpose of schools to help students develop civic competency. Two related strands of this scholarship

include the definition of the dimensions of democratic competency, generally defined normatively, drawing on ethics and political philosophy (Gutmann, 1987; Levine & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2010). Complementing these normative views are empirical studies on the effects of civic education. In the first strand, the definition of the kind of civic education is based on the definition of what kind of democratic citizen, a contested notion. For instance, John Dewey, a seminal contributor to a philosophy of democratic education, argued for social interactions and experience in school as very important formative experiences of democratic dispositions (Dewey, 1916). A second more recent strand of scholarship has focused on the kind of competencies that citizens need to engage with others in increasingly culturally diverse societies (Howe, 1997) and on the skills that subdominant groups need to be more equitably represented in the political process (Garcia-Bedoya, 2005).

Civic education approaches vary, including those that focus on helping students gain knowledge of specific subject matter, such as history or social studies (Naemi & Junn, 1998), and those that emphasize student experiences and pedagogy as important in forming democratic dispositions (Levine, 2007). Three cross-national comparative studies on civic and citizenship education conducted by IEA¹ documented a wide range of approaches to civic education and highlighted the importance of pedagogical practices as predictors of both civic attitudes and skills (Ainley, Schulz & Friedman, 2013). However, most of this scholarship is based on correlational designs which do not allow making causal inferences about the contribution of particular education

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interventions to the development of civic skills and knowledge.

Current scholarship sees 'civic literacy' as the result not just of knowledge of facts which are relevant to understand the functioning of democratic institutions but of skills in applying this knowledge to interpreting situations. For example, the ability to interpret a political message and make inferences about the intents and interests of its source or to be able to determine when specific situations violate basic democratic rights. In addition, civic literacy includes dispositions to act in ways congruent with democratic interactions.

As with other knowledge and skills, civic competency is the result of influences inside as well as outside the school, and isolating those is often problematic. Recent research suggests that schools have greater influence on civic competency than previously acknowledged (Niemi & Junn, 1998; Kahne & Sporte, 2002; Garcia-Bedolla, 2010), in contrast to earlier studies highlighting the role of socioeconomic and family background (Abramowitz, 1983; Achen, 2002). In practice, disentangling the relative contributions of social background of families and school influences is extremely difficult in settings where these social institutions have focused on political socialization over centuries.

A related and insufficiently addressed issue in the study of civic education, concerns theorizing and testing the way in which various formative dimensions of democratic competency relate to each other, to educational interventions, and to civic outcomes. Of special interest is the question of 'transfer', examining whether and under what conditions the knowledge gained in particular educational settings, such as a curriculum, is retained and translates into skills to solve problems not directly linked to what was learned (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). Transfer across dimensions of democratic competency is often assumed but has been rarely explored. For instance, an intervention focused on promoting tolerance and acceptance of gender differences might help students become more tolerant of other forms of difference, such as race, religion or sexual orientation.

The questions about transfer of skills and the related concept of 'deeper learning', are identified as one of the central concerns with the science of education for the 21st century. As stated in a recent report of the National Research Council: "If the goal of instruction is to prepare students to accomplish tasks or solve problems exactly like the ones addressed during instruction, then deeper learning is not needed... When the goal is to prepare students to be able to be successful in solving new problems and adapting to new situations, then deeper learning is called for" (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012; p. 70).

Societies experiencing political transitions to democracy are particularly adept contexts to investigate the determinants of civic skills, given that different social institutions adapt at varying speeds practices aligned with democratic values. For instance, at the beginning of the 2000s, Mexico underwent a political transition as the

party that had ruled the country for seventy years was voted out of office. Along with this transition, the country also underwent a reform of its civic education curricula. Given these political and curricular discontinuities, Mexico represents an interesting case study in which empirical work can inform the knowledge about the efficacy of various curricula and pedagogies in developing particular dimensions of civic competency. In this paper, we study the impact on teacher practices on a range of civic dimensions of three pedagogical approaches to complement the eight-grade (ages 13-14) civic education curriculum in Nuevo Leon. We also explore the transfer to civic skills not directly targeted by these three interventions.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In the Context section, we describe the context of the study. Then, in the Research Design, we describe the research site, dataset, and measures. We also explain the methodology used to assess the impact of the different interventions and comment on the limitations of the study. In the Results section, we present and describe the results. Finally, in the Discussion and Conclusions we discuss the main findings of the paper and comment on implications for the literature of civic education'.

2 Context

In 2000, Mexico experienced a political transition when power was transferred from the party which had ruled for seven decades (Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI) to a different party (National Action Party, or PAN). As part of the institutional changes immediately preceding and following the political transition represented by the presidential elections of 2000, a number of reform initiatives gave greater priority to civic education in the country. These included revising the curriculum to align it with democratic values, producing new textbooks and investing in the professional development of teachers.

Until 1999, civic education was only taught in grades 8 and 9, with an exclusive focus on the role of government and legal institutions, but no discussion of democratic participation by citizens. In 1999 the curriculum reform introduced the subject of civic and ethic education as part of social studies at the primary and secondary levels. The development of the curriculum and national textbooks spanned over a decade. Civic and ethic education became a separate subject in 2006 for grades 8 and 9, and in 2009 for grades 1 to 6. It is not taught in 7th grade. The new subject had the purpose of developing students' democratic competencies and skills, giving more emphasis to the role of school experiences as part of the development of citizenship (Reimers & Cardenas, 2012). In particular, the new curriculum aimed to develop the following competencies: (1) self-knowledge and self-care, (2) self-regulation and responsible exercise of freedom, (3) respect and valuing of difference, (4) sense of belonging to the community, nation and humanity, (5) peaceful resolution of conflicts, (6) social and political participation, (7) abiding by the



rule of law, and (8) understanding and valuing of democracy.

In addition to the institutional changes resulting from the democratic transition, a factor motivating interest in civic education among education officials in Mexico was the perception of growing levels of violence associated with the criminal activity of drug cartels. The rise in crime and violence created a context in which the efforts of schools to develop democratic competencies were somewhat at odds with the cultural practices experienced by students among peers and family. Again, this provided a unique opportunity to examine whether schools can teach knowledge and values against the grain of other social values and practices.

Despite the reform in the curriculum and civic education efforts in Mexico, there is limited evidence that changes in teacher practices and school culture took place in the ways that would benefit student's civic skills and knowledge. Thus, in this paper, we study the impact on teacher practices and student's civic skills of three pedagogical approaches—lesson planning, participatory learning, and a combination of both—to teach the new civic education curriculum. Specifically, we examine (1) whether there is an impact of the teaching training interventions on teacher practices, reported by students; (2) whether there is an impact on the civic skills and knowledge dimensions explicitly targeted by these interventions; and (3) whether there is transfer of impact to other civic skills and knowledge dimensions not targeted by these interventions.

3 Research design

To assess the impact of three pedagogical approaches to civic education, this study (Note 1) compared teacher practices, as well as civic skills and knowledge of groups of lower-secondary school students attending public school in the outskirts of the city of Monterrey (Note 2), Mexico. We used as instrument a self-administered questionnaire based on a broad conception of civic competency, which would allow an examination of transfer; that is, of the extent to which gains were observed in civic dimensions not explicitly targeted in the curriculum or pedagogy.

The study was conducted during the academic year 2008-2009. A group of teachers of civic education in a randomly selected sample of schools in the greater Monterrey area were invited to participate in the study. Then, schools were randomly selected from the roster of all morning-shift schools in the greater Metropolitan area of Monterrey. All those approached accepted the invitation to participate. Within each school, entire 8th grade classrooms were randomly assigned to one of three conditions:

a. *Lesson Planning (LP)*: Teachers were assisted in developing and implementing high quality lesson plans reflecting the official civic education curriculum. The focus of this treatment group was to help teachers develop pedagogical strategies to cover the curriculum, teaching units extending over several

days with a variety of instructional materials and approaches to engage students. This condition of treatment was designed to assess the impact of the existing curriculum and instructional materials with teacher professional development and support for lesson planning.

b. *Participatory Learning (PL)*: Teachers were instructed in the use of a participatory methodology (Note 3) where students had to select a challenge in the community and develop an action project to address it, using this as the anchor of the civic education curriculum. This condition was designed to assess the impact of an alternative pedagogical approach combining service learning, project-based learning and experiential learning.

c. *Lesson Planning and Participatory Learning (LP & PL)*: Teachers were assisted in developing and implementing high quality lesson plans AND instructed in the use of participatory learning. This condition was designed to assess the impact of combining treatments (a) and (b).

In addition, in each of the selected schools, students in 9th grade also filled in the questionnaire at the beginning of the school year. This group was meant to assess the impact of the civics curriculum and existing instructional materials without intentional support in teacher professional development (business as usual) and to serve as a control group in this study. For logistical reasons about 13% of the students were only given the pre-test in January of 2009 rather than September 2008.

In schools that had at least three different teachers and sections of eight grade, each of them was randomly assigned to one of the treatments described in this study. When schools had fewer than three sections/teachers, conditions of treatments were randomly chosen and assigned to each of the sections. Also, when schools had more than one section of ninth grade all of those students were surveyed. It is important to note that it was not possible to include a control group in each school. In total more than one treatment was implemented in 18 of the 39 schools in the study.

3.1 The intervention

The design and implementation of the intervention involved the following steps. Initially staff from Via Educacion and Universidad Iberoamericana designed two training manuals (one for each treatment A and B), which presented innovative teaching strategies linked to the objectives of the Mexican national curriculum for the subject of Civics and Ethics. Manuals were created to strengthen the practice of teaching, learning of teachers, and the development of citizenship competencies in their students. Also, staff from Via Educacion designed and administered a ten-hour teacher education training program in which teachers participated at the outset of the project. For the continuous professional development, staff from OrganizationA developed and implemented a follow-up program to support the implementation of each treatment. This program was taught in 10



monthly sessions of 5 hours. About 90% of the teachers attended each monthly session.

To guarantee that the intervention was being implemented properly, staff from Via Educacion monitored the field implementation. To do this, they trained 90 undergraduate psychology and education students of the University of Monterrey who had to visit schools every week and were previously trained to monitor the implementation of the program at schools.

3.2. Sample

The initial sample included 60 teachers in eighth grade and 20 teachers of ninth grade from lower-secondary schools in Monterrey, Mexico. Of the 39 schools, 10 were technical focused schools and the rest were general track schools. Nevertheless, both type of schools follow the same civic and ethic education curriculum. In total the 2,608 students participated in the study.

Table 1: Dimensions assessed by the study

Targeted	Teaching practices	Civic pedagogical practices
		General pedagogical practices
		Discussion of civic topics
		Opportunity for student participation
		Democratic practices in school
	Civic attitudes, knowledge and skills	Attitudes towards gender equity
		Tolerance to different people
		Trust in institutions
		Tolerance towards breaking the norm
		Interpersonal communication skills
		Civic knowledge and skills
		Pedagogical efficacy of the school
		Participation of student in school
		Intentions of political & social engagement
Political & social engagement in the community		
Not targeted	Civic attitudes, knowledge and skills	Future orientation
		Trust in close people
		Trust in people in general
		Trust in relatives
		Attitudes towards corruption
		Attitudes towards authoritarianism
		Attitude towards the role of government regarding media
		Civic efficacy confronting discrimination
		Perception of respect of youth rights
		Interest in politics

All teachers remained in the program for the entire duration of the study, except one who went on maternity leave and who was replaced by her substitute. The same number of students in treatment groups completed the pre and post survey, but 663 students in the control group completed only the pre survey. Due to logistical problems we were unable to match pre and post-surveys at the student level or to track in and out of school transfers of individual students during the academic year. To assess the overall comparability of the groups

before and after the study we conducted a series of statistical tests of the differences in the social composition of the groups, finding them equivalent before and after the study and across groups.

In Table 1, we present the means and standard deviations of individual and home characteristics for each group at baseline. We can observe that 40% of the students are male, average age is 13.5 years old, and 2% to 3%, speak an indigenous language. On average, participants have 2 siblings, have families of 5 members, and 89% reported living with both parents. They have on average, 40 books in their homes and expect to complete a college education. Their parents, on average, have a secondary education—equivalent to nine years of schooling.

3 Instruments

Students in the treatment groups were given the questionnaire at the beginning (September 2008) and end (July 2009) of the academic year in which the teachers taught the course of civic education, following one of the three above mentioned conditions. The questionnaire included 197 multiple option questions assessing several dimensions of civic knowledge and attitudes. These included selected items from the second and third International Civic Education Study developed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), as well as from the World Values Survey, a National survey of youth in Mexico, and several surveys of political attitudes in Mexico. The survey included also items assessing socio-demographical background of the students. The instrument was piloted with a small sample of students not participating in the study; minor modifications to content, language and format were made as a result of this pilot.

The questionnaire items covered the constructs presented in table 1, with each dimension including two or more survey questions. We divided dimensions into three categories: teacher practice, students' skills targeted by the interventions, and students' skills not targeted by the interventions.

For each of these dimensions a summary indicator was constructed using principal component analysis (Note 4), standardized to a 0-100 scale. That is, an index close to 0 indicates a low fulfilment of the dimension, while a value close to 100 indicates a high achievement of the dimension under analysis. Since each dimension integrates several items in the questionnaire, this poses the limitation that only students who had answered all the items within each indicator were included for that indicator. Thus, the composition of the sample may vary somewhat across the different dimensions. To assess this possible threat to validity, we conducted a series of statistical tests and found no differences in baseline characteristics of the sample across dimensions. In addition, we conducted the analyses using a dataset in which we had imputed missing values and found no differences in the overall findings. For simplicity reasons



we only report the analyses on the original dataset but results are robust to different correction strategies.

Table 2: Mean values and standard deviations of students' characteristics at baseline

	All	Lesson Planning	Participatory Learning	Planning and Participation	Control
Male	0.403 (0.491)	0.385 (0.487)	0.428 (0.495)	0.354 (0.479)	0.436 (0.496)
Age	13.59 (0.684)	13.34 (0.536)	13.37 (0.553)	13.32 (0.503)	14.29 (0.581)
Indigenous language	0.028 (0.165)	0.025 (0.156)	0.024 (0.154)	0.028 (0.165)	0.035 (0.183)
Number of siblings	2.29 (1.570)	2.25 (1.424)	2.21 (1.392)	2.23 (1.553)	2.45 (1.836)
Household size	5.38 (1.892)	5.33 (1.800)	5.23 (1.679)	5.53 (2.037)	5.44 (2.013)
Number of books	42.31 (49.749)	42.80 (50.558)	45.56 (51.953)	39.97 (46.957)	40.79 (49.332)
Expected level of education	5.86 (0.925)	5.84 (0.928)	5.95 (0.870)	5.82 (0.981)	5.82 (0.917)
Mother's education	4.30 (1.374)	4.29 (1.296)	4.63 (1.410)	4.16 (1.389)	4.13 (1.330)
Father's education	4.52 (1.448)	4.60 (1.327)	4.86 (1.383)	4.32 (1.499)	4.34 (1.481)
Observations	2,603	517	695	733	663

Note: standard deviations in parentheses. Male and indigenous language are binary variables so their mean value should be interpreted as a proportion.

3.4. Data analysis

To address our three research questions, given that assignment to treatment was random, we use an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model with random effects for classrooms classroom and clustered standard errors, controlling for some baseline covariates:

$$\text{Dimension}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 T_{LP} + \beta_2 T_{PL} + \beta_3 T_{LP\&PL} + \gamma X + \varepsilon$$

where, the outcome Dimension indicates the standardized value of each assessed Dimension for each student; TLP represents the dummy variable for student *i* in a classroom assigned to Lesson planning group; TPL represents the dummy variable for student *i* in a classroom assigned to Participatory Learning group; TLP&PL represents the dummy variable for student *i* in a classroom assigned to the combined treatment group (LP & PL); and X designates the vector for student and school baseline characteristics. These covariates include: male (1 if male; 0 otherwise), age (in years), indigenous language (1 if indigenous; 0 otherwise), household size (number of members), number of books (number), parents' education (level), and whether the student attends a general or a technical school (1 if technical; 0 otherwise).

In this case, estimates for each treatment should be interpreted as impact with respect to the control group. For assessed outcome, additional hypothesis tests are conducted to test whether there is a significant statistical difference between the treatments.

An important assumption to using this methodology is that, given that assignment to treatment conditions was random, experimental groups are statistically equivalent at baseline. To test the equivalency of groups, we conducted a series of t-tests. In table 3 we show that there are few significant differences (at 5% level) between the groups, except for the parents' level of education in some cases. However, in absolute terms the difference is small and represents about 1.5 years of lower secondary education. In addition, as would be expected, students in the control group, who are attending ninth grade, are on average a year older than the students in the treatments groups (eight grade). Overall, tests suggest that random assignment of classes to conditions succeeded in creating comparable groups of students across treatments, and that at baseline treatment groups are comparable to the control group. In the analysis, we control for these different characteristics of students to increase precision and avoid any potential bias that might be created by its omission.



Table 3: T-statistics and p-values for the differences at baseline between the experimental groups

	LP vs Control	PL vs Control	LP&PL vs Control	LP vs PL	LP vs LP&PL	PL vs LP&PL
Male	-1.76 (0.080)	-0.29 (0.774)	-3.02 (0.084)	-1.50 (0.133)	1.09 (0.276)	2.77 (0.006)
Age	-29.00*** (0.000)	-29.69*** (0.000)	-32.08** (0.000)	-0.91 (0.363)	0.65 (0.515)	1.69 (0.092)
Indigenous language	-1.00 (0.316)	-1.11 (0.265)	-0.71 (0.478)	0.04 (0.966)	-0.33 (0.745)	-0.39 (0.694)
Number of siblings	-1.49 (0.136)	-1.62 (0.106)	-1.86 (0.064)	-0.01 (0.990)	0.30 (0.768)	0.34 (0.736)
Household size	-0.13 (0.897)	-0.49 (0.627)	0.82 (0.414)	0.34 (0.732)	-0.94 (0.350)	-1.34 (0.180)
Number of books	0.67 (0.500)	1.71 (0.088)	-0.31 (0.760)	-0.91 (0.361)	0.97 (0.334)	2.04** (0.041)
Expected level of education	0.48 (0.631)	2.67** (0.008)	0.02 (0.987)	-1.98** (0.048)	0.45 (0.654)	2.54** (0.011)
Mother's education	1.88 (0.060)	5.98*** (0.000)	0.36 (0.720)	-3.71*** (0.000)	1.47 (0.141)	5.36*** (0.000)
Father's education	2.71*** (0.007)	5.79*** (0.000)	-0.22 (0.829)	-2.79*** (0.005)	2.81*** (0.005)	5.77*** (0.000)

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

p-values of the t-statistic in parenthesis

4 Results

To examine the effect of the pedagogical treatments on teacher practice we describe the characterizations provided by students of the practices of their teachers in four dimensions, and examine how those differ by treatment group. To estimate the impact of each treatment group, as compared to the control group, on the pedagogical experiences of students in civic education, we conducted ordinary least square (OLS) analyses, with random effects for classrooms. We assess separately the effect of each treatment on each reported dimension. Below, we present the impact of each treatment on different sets of dimensions categorized to address each of the research questions. Given that the estimates are expressed in terms of units of each index, for comparison purposes and to facilitate interpretation we then transformed them to be expressed in terms of standard deviation of the respective dimension in the pre-questionnaire. These are robust differences in excess of a third of a standard deviation for all the dimensions where the differences are significant.

4.1. Effects of the intervention on teacher practices

In table 4, the coefficients for each treatment group indicate the average increase in each specific dimension index associated to participating in that group, relative to the control group (Note 5). The three treatments examined in this study intended to influence these four dimensions of teaching practice, except for lesson plans

which did not intend to influence democratic experiences in school.

We observe statistically significant effects, at 5% level, of all the treatments on the dimensions of *civic pedagogy*, *discussion of civic topics*, and *student participation in school governance*. The differences for general pedagogical practices and civic school practices are in the expected direction, positive, but significant only for the Participatory Learning (PL) group for *pedagogical practices*, and for the group combining both treatments for *School practices*. That is, students in the three treatment groups reported significantly different experiences relative to those in the control group, for the analyzed dimensions. However, there were no significant differences across the three treatment groups. This implies that each of the treatments succeeded in significantly improving teacher practice.

In table 5, we report the effects of each treatment in terms of standard deviations. For the *civic pedagogical practices* and for *discussion of civic topics*, students in all treatment groups report an increase of about 0.25 standard deviations (SD) above students in the control group. For *opportunity for student participation* the differences are between 0.21 and 0.33 standard deviation according to the treatment. It is to be expected that, since the treatments emphasized teacher practice in the classroom rather than in the school, there would be greater effects at this level.



Table 4: Effects of the treatments on different dimensions of Teaching practices

	Pedagogical Practices	Pedagogical practices oriented to civic education	Discussion of civic themes at school	School practices oriented to civic education	Student participation in school decisions
Constant	73.65*** (10.850)	71.03*** (10.740)	101.7*** (13.850)	93.47*** (13.870)	63.70*** (23.320)
Lesson Planning	3.485 (3.093)	5.637*** (1.988)	5.522** (2.479)	0.0154 (2.150)	7.314** (3.449)
Participatory Learning	4.656*** (1.680)	5.642*** (1.954)	6.798*** (2.152)	-2.801 (2.120)	9.129** (3.743)
Planning and Participation	2.885 (2.392)	7.407*** (2.017)	6.354*** (2.224)	3.985** (1.927)	11.46*** (3.378)
Control Variables	α	α	α	α	α
<i>HO: $\beta_{LP} = \beta_{PL}$</i>	<i>0.642</i>	<i>0.998</i>	<i>0.575</i>	<i>0.31</i>	<i>0.622</i>
<i>HO: $\beta_{LP} = \beta_{LP\&PL}$</i>	<i>0.83</i>	<i>0.44</i>	<i>0.721</i>	<i>0.109</i>	<i>0.235</i>
<i>HO: $\beta_{PL} = \beta_{LP\&PL}$</i>	<i>0.397</i>	<i>0.432</i>	<i>0.807</i>	<i>0.007</i>	<i>0.499</i>
<i>HO: $\beta_{LP} + \beta_{PL} = \beta_{LP\&PL}$</i>	<i>0.137</i>	<i>0.181</i>	<i>0.052</i>	<i>0.034</i>	<i>0.318</i>
Observations	2,062	2,076	2,045	2,037	2,093

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses.

P-values of the hypothesis test of no difference between treatments in italics

Table 5: Summary of the effects of each treatments on different dimensions of Teaching practices, expressed in terms of standard deviations

	Pedagogical practices oriented to civic education	Pedagogical Practices	Discussion of civic themes at school	Student participation in school decisions	School practices oriented to civic education
Lesson Planning	0.185	0.279***	0.220**	0.001	0.215**
Participatory Learning	0.248***	0.280***	0.270***	-0.126	0.269**
Planning and Participation	0.154	0.368***	0.253***	0.179**	0.337***

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

While it is not surprising to observe effects on *civic pedagogy* (around 0.25 SD), as all treatments provided teachers support to use a wider pedagogical repertoire, it is somewhat unexpected to see effects on *discussion of civic topics*, a dimension which includes discussions of different forms of discrimination; topics already included in the national curriculum and in the textbooks. These findings suggest that enhancing subject specific pedagogy transfers into greater efficacy in covering the intended curriculum. That is, treatments focused on teacher classroom practice transfer also into increased students' experiences of participation at the school level, including student elections, representation in school bodies, input in academic projects and disciplinary norms. This implies that students transfer the skills gained in the classroom into other domains of their school experience.

It is expected that for the dimension of *general pedagogical practices* the only significant effects (0.25 SD) are in the project-based Participatory Learning treatment group since the items in that dimension focus

mostly on projects outside the school, like students working in teams and preparing presentations; all areas that were specifically targeted by such intervention. Somewhat unexpected was that the combined treatment group, where teachers engaged students in similar activities, did not have a significant effect. This fact proposes that there might be tradeoffs as teachers balance the demands of increasingly complex instructional approaches.

It is encouraging to find that in all treatments, teachers were able to provide increased *opportunities for student participation*, even for the Lesson planning group which did not have that specific emphasis. This confirms that to some extent the teacher training interventions were able to change the classroom dynamic.

Overall, we do not observe any significant difference between the effects of the treatments suggesting that treatments play an important role in changing teacher practices but the specific approach in which teachers are trained does not matter.

4.2 Effects on student attitudes, knowledge and skills targeted by the intervention

In this section we examine the impact of the treatments on various dimensions of civic attitudes, knowledge and skills of the student—as measured in the post-questionnaire—that were specifically targeted by any of

the treatments. In table 6 we present the estimates of the average effects of the treatments on each of the targeted dimensions, relative to the control group. In the bottom panel we present the associated p-values of additional hypotheses tests conducted to contrast the statistical significance of differences between the various treatment groups.

Table 6: Effects of the treatments on different TARGETED dimensions of student’s civic attitudes, skills and knowledge

	Attitudes towards gender equity	Tolerance to different people	Trust in institutions	Tolerance towards breaking the norm	Interpersonal communication skills	Civic knowledge and skills	Pedagogical efficacy of the school	Participation of student in school	Intentions of political & social engagement	Political & social engagement in the community
Constant	60.72*** (11.610)	67.90*** (14.360)	82.01*** (17.210)	110.2*** (13.780)	92.07*** (12.890)	90.96*** (12.460)	24.29* (12.570)	81.63*** (14.940)	49.58*** (13.860)	47.59** (8.486)
Lesson Planning	10.24*** (2.847)	1.443 (1.934)	-6.691** (3.343)	-1.994 (1.874)	1.396 (2.309)	0.832 (2.216)	2.394 (2.079)	4.553* (2.515)	0.71 (1.227)	0.496 (1.758)
Participatory Learning	10.63*** (2.326)	1.616 (1.853)	-6.472** (2.739)	-0.0328 (1.542)	2.937* (1.669)	2.054 (1.691)	6.363*** (2.461)	5.941*** (2.019)	1.379 (1.369)	2.323* (1.288)
Planning and Participation	8.983*** (2.557)	0.5 (2.069)	-5.872** (2.927)	-0.11 (1.280)	3.411** (1.578)	2.233 (2.049)	3.776 (2.352)	6.113*** (2.139)	2.009 (1.680)	1.791 (1.444)
Covariates	α	α	α	α	α	α	α	α	α	α
<i>Ho: $\beta_{LP} = \beta_{PL}$</i>	<i>0.841</i>	<i>0.925</i>	<i>0.927</i>	<i>0.298</i>	<i>0.52</i>	<i>0.588</i>	<i>0.071</i>	<i>0.572</i>	<i>0.59</i>	<i>0.187</i>
<i>Ho: $\beta_{LP} = \beta_{LP\&PL}$</i>	<i>0.495</i>	<i>0.664</i>	<i>0.735</i>	<i>0.241</i>	<i>0.386</i>	<i>0.567</i>	<i>0.49</i>	<i>0.527</i>	<i>0.403</i>	<i>0.388</i>
<i>Ho: $\beta_{PL} = \beta_{LP\&PL}$</i>	<i>0.223</i>	<i>0.545</i>	<i>0.752</i>	<i>0.958</i>	<i>0.767</i>	<i>0.921</i>	<i>0.226</i>	<i>0.924</i>	<i>0.697</i>	<i>0.61</i>
Observations	2,041	2,052	1,986	2,030	2,015	2,059	2,121	2,036	1,964	2,067

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses. P-values of the hypothesis test of no difference between treatments in italics

Table 8: Summary of the effects of each treatments on different TARGETED dimensions of student’s civic attitudes, skills and knowledge, expressed in terms of standard deviations

	Attitudes towards gender equity	Tolerance to different people	Trust in institutions	Tolerance towards breaking the norm	Interpersonal communication skills	Civic knowledge and skills	Pedagogical efficacy of the school	Participation of student in school	Intentions of political & social engagement	Political & social engagement in the community
Lesson Planning	0.502***	0.063	-0.260**	-0.086	0.075	0.115	0.068	0.195*	0.037	0.034
Participatory Learning	0.521***	0.071	-0.252**	-0.001	0.157*	0.305	0.089	0.255***	0.071	0.159*
Planning and Participation	0.440***	0.022	-0.228**	-0.005	0.183**	0.181	0.164*	0.262***	0.104	0.122

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Trust in institutions is a dimension targeted by the curriculum, and to some extent by the interventions, although not as specifically as tolerance or knowledge. As we see in Table 6, there is a negative impact on institutions in the order of 0.25 standard deviations. Although troublesome, this result might be result of the combination of greater knowledge of the role and responsibilities of governmental institutions with what

their perception of the current context when assessing their performance.

In tables 6 and 8, we see that the Lesson planning (LP) approach has no significant effect, as compared to the control, on any other dimension. It only shows weak evidence of increase on students’ participation in school. Although civic knowledge and skills, and pedagogical efficacy of the school which are specifically targeted by



this treatment have estimates that go on the expected direction there are not significantly difference from the control or the other treatments.

We observe that the participatory learning (PL) approach has a positive impact on the dimensions of civic knowledge and skills and on fostering student participation in school, compared to the control group. Their effects are on the magnitude of 0.31 and 0.26 standard deviations, respectively (0.26 SD). This treatment also shows marginally significant impact, at the 10% level, on the development of interpersonal communication skills and on the intention for political and social action in the community. However, there is no significant difference of the impact of this treatment, as compared to the other treatments, in any of the targeted dimensions. It is puzzling the fact that only participatory learning had impact in civic knowledge and skills, this impact was expected for all three treatments.

The combined lesson planning and participatory learning (LP&PL) methodology has a positive impact on interpersonal communication skills (0.18 SD) but not on civic knowledge and skills. The participatory learning

treatment emphasized working in teams, so it is somewhat surprising that there are only effects when it is combined with support for lesson planning. It is unsurprising that support in lesson planning alone does not impact this dimension.

4.3 Effects on student civic attitudes and skills not targeted by the intervention

Regarding the students' civic attitudes and skills not targeted by the treatments, we observe a positive effect of all the treatments on the *future orientation* of students. That is, relative to the control group, students whose teachers received pedagogical training to use any of the three approaches were more likely to make plans for one's life, trust that one will achieve personal goals in the future and that completing their studies are important. The highest effect on future orientation was found among the Lesson Planning group (0.42 SD), followed by the combined treatment (0.31 SD), and the lesson planning group (0.30 SD).

Table 7: Effects of the treatments on different not targeted dimensions of student's civic attitudes, skills and knowledge

	Future orientation	Trust in close people	Trust in relatives	Trust in people	Attitudes towards corruption	Attitudes toward authoritarianism	Attitudes of government toward media	Civic efficacy	Perception of respect of youth rights	Interest in politics
Constant	76.77*** (17.150)	99.73*** (12.070)	106.7*** (12.630)	86.37*** (16.130)	57.97*** (15.170)	31.99** (13.700)	62.58*** (16.060)	97.60*** (10.940)	14.27 (17.020)	72.21*** (15.300)
Lesson Planning	8.976** (4.156)	-1.798 (1.748)	7.653* (4.084)	-3.092* (1.829)	-1.749 (1.582)	-1.699 (1.363)	2.32 (1.592)	1.203 (2.237)	-0.56 (1.728)	-0.0867 (1.883)
Participatory Learning	6.375** (2.548)	0.00751 (1.255)	5.024* (2.652)	-4.341*** (1.540)	-0.531 (1.247)	-1.52 (1.300)	0.768 (1.875)	1.58 (1.439)	1.247 (1.954)	-1.568 (1.562)
Planning and Participation	6.584** (3.020)	1.024 (1.404)	6.122** (2.657)	-2.487 (1.886)	0.982 (1.332)	-1.29 (1.484)	0.312 (1.726)	2.911* (1.589)	-0.119 (1.655)	-1.397 (1.539)
Covariates	α	α	α	α	α	α	α	α	α	α
<i>Ho: $\beta_{LP} = \beta_{PL}$</i>	0.249	0.303	0.324	0.459	0.422	0.889	0.384	0.859	0.407	0.367
<i>Ho: $\beta_{LP} = \beta_{LP\&PL}$</i>	0.269	0.125	0.522	0.759	0.086	0.77	0.214	0.42	0.814	0.437
<i>Ho: $\beta_{PL} = \beta_{LP\&PL}$</i>	0.861	0.445	0.387	0.272	0.228	0.867	0.812	0.298	0.505	0.9
Observations	2,083	2,081	2,085	2,046	2,073	1,966	2,072	2,098	2,091	1,825

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Cluster - robust standard errors in parentheses. P-values of the hypothesis test of no difference between treatments in italics

In tables 7 and 9, we observe no impact in *trust in close people* at school. However, we do find a positive impact (0.30 SD) of the combined treatment on the *trust in relatives*, and marginally significant impact of the single treatment on that dimension. There is no significant difference between the treatments. Surprisingly, compared to the control, there is a negative impact (0.20 SD) of the participatory learning condition on the trust in

people in general. The effects of all the treatment on this dimension go in the same direction.

Other dimensions that we explore here, like civic efficacy as standing up and confronting discrimination, were not direct target of the interventions or of the curriculum so the lack of impact is expected. There was no effect on attitudes towards corruption, authoritarianism, and the role of government regarding media. The



perception of respect of youth rights and the interest in politics were not affected by the intervention either.

Table 9: Summary of the effects of each treatments on different NOT TARGETED dimensions of student's civic attitudes, skills and knowledge, expressed in terms of standard deviations

	Future orientation	Trust in close people	Trust in relatives	Trust in people	Attitudes towards corruption	Attitudes toward authoritarianism	Attitudes of government toward media	Civic efficacy	Are youth rights respected	Interest in politics
Lesson Planning	0.422**	-0.087	0.380*	-0.137*	-0.076	-0.077	0.083	0.037	-0.022	-0.004
Participatory Learning	0.299**	0.000	0.250*	-0.192***	-0.023	-0.069	0.027	0.090	0.049	-0.068
Planning and Participation	0.310**	0.050	0.304**	-0.110	0.043	-0.058	0.011	0.098*	-0.005	-0.060

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

4.4 Overall effects

In table 10, we synthesize the effects of the three treatments compared to the control and to each other.

The sign indicates the direction of the effect (i.e. positive or negative), and the number of signs indicating whether the differences are significant at the 1%, 5% or 10% level.

Table 10. Direction and significance level of the effect of each treatment group

	LP vs Control	PL vs Control	LP&PL vs Control	LP vs PL	LP vs LP&PL	PL vs LP&PL
<i>Teaching practices</i>						
Civic pedagogical practices	+++	+++	+++			
General pedagogical practices		+++				
Discussion of civic topics	+++	+++	+++			
Opportunity for student participation	+++	+++	+++			
Democratic practices in school			+++			+++
<i>Civic attitudes, knowledge and skills</i>						
Targeted						
Attitudes towards gender equity	+++	+++	+++			
Tolerance to different people						
Trust in institutions	--	--	--			
Tolerance to break norm						
Interpersonal communication skills		+	++			
Civic knowledge and skills		+++				
Pedagogical efficacy of school			+			
Participation of student in school	+	+++	+++			
Intentions of political and social action						
Political and social action in the community		+				
Not targeted						
Future orientation	++	++	++			
Trust in close people						
Trust in relatives	+	+	++			
Trust in people	-	---				
Attitudes towards corruption					--	
Attitudes toward authoritarianism						
Attitudes of government toward media						
Civic efficacy confronting discrimination						
Perception of respect of youth rights						
Interest in politics						

Note: +++ positive and p<0.01, ++ positive and p<0.05, + positive and p<0.1
--- negative and p<0.01, -- negative and p<0.05, - negative and p<0.1



5 Discussion and conclusions

The results of this study show that teachers, when they are supported by professional development, can indeed help students develop competencies for democratic citizenship. Teacher professional development is a powerful lever to influence instruction, to some extent overriding differences between pedagogical approaches to civic education. All treatment groups demonstrated significant changes in pedagogical practices relative to the control group. There were no differences in the pedagogical changes observed between the three different treatment groups, suggesting that different interventions can have similar results.

Teacher professional development, and the subsequent pedagogical changes, result in students' gains on dimensions which are critical for democratic citizenship, most notably an orientation towards the future and equitable attitudes towards people of different genders, as well as perceived gains in interpersonal communication skills and civic knowledge and skills. Students are also more participative in school as a result of these interventions. These effects, of the order of a third of a standard deviation for future orientation illustrate that there is some transfer in civic instruction, as the particular treatments evaluated in this study did not specifically target fostering orientation towards the future. But this is the only evidence of transfer in this study, for the most part impact is only found on the dimensions which were explicitly targeted by the curriculum or by the interventions, and impact does not transfer to other dimensions. As expected, all treatments have effects at least marginally significant effects on student participation at school. However, this does not transfer into intentions of future political and social participation, or political and social action in their community. Only the Participatory learning program translates into increased community participation.

It is puzzling that only the participatory learning group produces gains in knowledge and skills in civic education, and that the combined group does not achieve gains of the same statistical significance. This superiority of the impact of the participatory learning group to the other two treatments is also observed for impact in political and social action in the community, suggesting that excessive demands for change (two new approaches) on teacher practice may produce lower results than moderate demands (a single new approach).

Teacher professional development in civic education translates into student gains in trust but only towards relatives, consistent with the fact that this was not a direct purpose of the treatments. Paradoxically, students in the treatment groups have significantly lower levels of trust in people in general and in institutions. We cannot explain how come interventions enhancing civic education could make students less trusting of strangers or of institutions, particularly government institutions, as they make them more trusting of relatives. In two of the treatment groups, participatory learning and the

combined group, students had increased levels of interpersonal communication skills.

Equally interesting are the many dimensions specifically targeted by the treatments but that had no observable impact. The following were dimensions the treatment program attempted to influence, even though no effects were found: tolerance towards people and difference, tolerance to break the norms, civic efficacy in confronting discrimination, and intentions of future political engagement. The lack of effects in those dimensions is especially troubling given the very low levels of democratic competency that the students demonstrate in those dimensions.

The fact that these interventions have differential effects on multiple dimensions, which one could reasonably expect to be components of the same construct of competency for democratic citizenship, suggests that the development of each of these various dimensions is relatively independent, as formative latent variables of the construct of democratic competency, and that there is little evidence of transfer. Hence different pedagogical approaches may be needed to address each of them. For example, the development of more tolerant attitudes, except towards gender differences, is evidently not a byproduct of a rich civic education course in which students either engage with content or in problem-solving. Explicit instruction or other experiences may be necessary to help students re-examine their openness to having neighbors of a different religion, or race, or sexual orientation. Similarly, changing the fairly high levels of tolerance towards breaking the norms, or towards corruption or authoritarianism, may require direct and intentional interventions.

To conclude, the power of schools and teachers to prepare students for democratic citizenship is best tested in settings where this involves teaching competencies that cannot be easily gained in other social institutions. Such is the case with developing democratic skills and attitudes in Mexico, a country where the construction of a democratic culture is a work in progress, even thirteen years after the first political transition towards more competitive politics. That significant percentage of youth, who have grown up after the political transition of 2000, have attitudes and knowledge that are clearly at odds with a democratic culture underscores the fragility of the culture of democracy, and how slow the pace of social progress is when it comes to changing political culture. But that in this setting, where other social institutions still reproduce the values and practices of a less democratic recent past, teachers can succeed in helping students gain more democratic views and understandings is also indicative of the power of these relatively recent interventions to prepare students to invent a future, congruent with the revolutionary idea that ordinary people can indeed rule their destinies.



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Notes

Note 1. This study evaluated an intervention called the Civics Education Project, developed and implemented by Via Educacion, a non-governmental organization in Mexico. The implementation of the intervention and the study were funded by the Institute for Cultural Change at Tufts University and by the Ministry of Education of the State of *Nuevo Leon, Mexico*. Since its first implementation during the 2008-2009 school year and with some changes and improvements, the Civics Education Project has continued, under the leadership of Via Educacion, up to the 2011-2012 academic school year. At the same time it has been under evaluation and the Program has also grown in impact on teacher skills and student civic competencies. During these four years the project has provided training to more than 600 teachers representing about a third of civic education teachers of the Monterrey metropolitan area. A replication of this study was attempted in the city of Acapulco in the State of Guerrero, in partnership with the *Universidad Iberoamericana* of Mexico and with the Secretary of Education of that State. A State-wide teacher strike midway through that study impeded the collection of data comparable to those reported in this article and the inclusion of the results of that study in this article. We appreciate and benefited from the exchanges with our colleagues at *Universidad Iberoamericana* during the design of the interventions, especially Sylvia Schmelkes, Martha Chicharro, Angeles Nuñez.

Note 2. Located in the state of Nuevo Leon, a highly industrialized state, Monterrey is the city with highest per capita income in Mexico. In curriculum based educational assessments, students in Monterrey obtain some of the highest levels of achievement in the country. The education system in Nuevo Leon, and specifically in Monterrey, is considered to be high functioning, relative to the national education system.

Note 3. The methodology used in this group is called "Learning to Participate by Participating" (*Aprender a Participar Participando*). More information available at [OrganizationAwebsite](#)

Note 4. Principal component analysis (PCA) is a statistical technique used for data reduction. It reduces a number of variables into a smaller number of 'dimensions'. In mathematical terms, from an initial set of correlated variables, the PCA creates uncorrelated indices or components, where each component is a linear weighted combination of the original variables. It is important to mention that, while creating indices helps to reduce the number of variables and group them into somehow more meaningful dimensions, this grouping might hide some interesting results of the impact of the treatments on specific variables. However, we observed

that the aggregate results using indices are a good reflect of what is seen at the individual level.

Note 5. Since classrooms were randomly assigned to treatments we could, and did, have simply examined differences between groups without further control predictors. However, the additional predictors were included to refine the estimates accounting for possible differences in the assignment of students to specific classes, over which we had no control. The coefficients of both sets of regressions are similar. In this chapter we report only the estimates from the analysis in which we included covariates for student's gender, age, indigenous

language and household size, number of books at home, parental education, and whether the student attends a general or a technical secondary school.

Endnote

¹ The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) in the late 1960s, 1996-99 and 2009.



Appendix A: Description of the Dimensions

In this section we describe the items contained by each analyzed dimension. For illustrative purposes we also provide some context for these items in terms of the percentage of the students that responded, as described below, in certain way. Since civic education is an explicit goal of Mexico's national curriculum, and a subject taught in every grade up to ninth grade, the responses reviewed here reflect the result of that foundation, on which the impact of the approaches investigated in this study is examined.

Dimensions of teacher practices targeted by the intervention

- **General pedagogical practices** assessed a range of practices, with a small percentage of the students responding that teachers do them always or almost always: teachers select the topics for class discussion (58%), students work in projects that involve finding information outside of school (49%), students work in teams about different topics and prepare presentations (53%), students participate in role playing and simulations (27%), teachers includes controversial topics for discussion in class (39%), students participate in community events or activities (28%).
- **Civic pedagogical practices** explored the experience of students with particular practices such as discussing in class conflicts in the community, analyze conflicts described in the news, research community challenges, examine benefits and challenges resulting from interaction of diverse cultural groups, and study the traditions of diverse cultural groups. Teaching human rights (which 84% of the students indicate happened to a great or some extent) and customs of different cultural groups (75%) are the most common practices, followed by examining benefits and challenges of cross-cultural interactions (68%), analyzing conflicts in the news (64%), discussing community conflicts (62%), and studying community challenges (54%).
- **Discussion of civic topics** included whether students had examined in school discrimination against: women (71%), indigenous groups (67%), foreigners (59%), racial discrimination (66%), religious discrimination (64%), discrimination against the poor (69%), against street children (67%), and whether they had studied the subjects of violence and abuse (75%), citizen participation (72%), gender equity (71%), dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution (72%), justice and common good (74%).
- **Democratic experiences in school** focuses on experiences of democratic participation including election of student representatives (87% do), student representation in school governance bodies (70%), student input in academic projects (56%), student input in shaping disciplinary school norms (75%), students participate in defining sanctions for those who break disciplinary norms (60%), consistent application of norms (67%), use of civic education textbook (82%), and fair treatment of students who break norms (27%).

Dimensions of student civic attitudes, skills and knowledge targeted by the intervention

- **Attitudes towards gender equity** included six items, while most students agree with the more gender equitable views, a sizable percentage holds inequitable views. For instance, 30% agree that household chores are women's work, 16% don't agree that women should participate in Congress and government equally as men, the same percentage does not agree that women should have the same rights as men, 29% think women should not participate in politics, 14% don't think women and men should receive equal pay for equal work, and 39% think men are better qualified than women to be political leaders.
- **Tolerance towards people** included responses to agreeing having as neighbors people involved in politics, from other ethnicity, poorer than you, richer than you, gay, foreigners, indigenous, living with HIV, from another religion. A significant percentage of respondents would not tolerate as neighbors politicians (40%), people of a different ethnicity (32%), people who are poorer (29%), people who are richer (34%), gays (49%), foreigners (23%), indigenous people (33%), people living with HIV (37%), or people of a different religion (22%).
- **Trust in institutions** included items such as demanding accountability of elected officials, and trust in the federal government, municipal government, courts, police, political parties and Congress. While two thirds of the students (72%) agree on the need for government accountability, a significant number do not trust the federal government (49%), teachers (19%), municipal government (45%), courts (46%), the police (40%), political parties (51%), and Congress (41%).
- **Tolerance to breaking the law** included 32% of youth say that it is silly to follow the law when most people don't, a significant proportion would agree with not paying taxes (27%), purchasing stolen goods (14%), parent hitting their children (21%), lying to obtain a benefit (14%), hitting a woman (12%), taking justice in one's hands (25%), give or take a bribe (15%), throw garbage in public places (10%) and driving under the influence (10%).



- **Pedagogical efficacy** included their views regarding the extent to which their education had prepared them to work in teams, be adaptable, solve problems, continue to learn, and analyze reality. While most students, over 85%, respond that schools had prepared them to a great or to some extent to do those things, only about half of those respond 'to a great extent'.
- **Interpersonal communication efficacy** included students views regarding whether they agreed that their education had taught them to respect those with different views (89%), value cultural and racial differences in Mexico (86%), understand the basic equality in rights among people of different gender (88%), understand their purpose in life (85%), help solve community problems (71%), understand the importance of voting in local and national elections (72%), solve and peacefully negotiate interpersonal conflicts (65%), solve and peacefully negotiate group conflicts (70%), recognize and express their own interests (80%), represent others in a group (75%), solving problems in peaceful ways (79%), dialogue with others (86%).
- **Civic efficacy** assessed whether they agreed with the statement that their education had prepared them to confront discrimination and exclusion using democratic means (69%), standing up to discriminations they witnessed and promoting the inclusion of those excluded (70%), and think about the interests of all in solving conflicts (83%).
- **Civic knowledge and skills** included several items assessing knowledge and understanding of basic concepts related to democratic politics such as purpose of democracy (14% identify the correct answer), definition of law (37%), employment discrimination (61%), purpose of multiple political parties (28%), who should govern in a democracy (14%), features of non-democratic regimes (24%), consequences of monopolies (22%), interpreting political campaign message (40%), job fairness (35%), goal of division of powers (24%), features of judicial norms (17%), conditions for participation of the national commission of human rights (43%), main political parties (62%), characteristics of democracy (34%), risks for democracy (26%), consequences of low voting participation (25%), taking justice in own hands (50%).
- **Student participation in school** examined agreement with the idea that there is value in joining others to find solutions (74% agree), students have the opportunity to share rules of the classroom (60% yes), schools improve when students elect representatives to contribute to solve problems (66% agree), positive changes result from students working together (73% agree), if students organized to share their views would help to solve problems (74% agree), working together students can have more influence than alone (68% agree).
- **Intentions of political and social action** includes long-term intentions expected voting in general elections (69%), joining a political party (36%), raising funds for a social cause (66%), organizing a petition (62%), demonstrating peacefully (49%), block transit as a form of protest (35%), discuss political issues with others (44%), write a letter to a newspaper (35%), and joining a social or political organization (41%).
- **Immediate political and social action in the community** include organizing members of community to solve a common problem (67%), contributing time to help members of community (64%), and participating in improvement of school in the community (74%).

Dimensions of student civic attitudes, skills and knowledge NOT targeted by the intervention

- **Future orientation** included three items: making plans for one's life, trusting that one will achieve personal goals in the future, and that studies are important to the respondent. While the majority of the students responses are on the side of the scale indicating agreement with the three statements, 10% to 20% are not, and those on the positive side of the scale are distributed over three different points in the scale. For example, whereas 46% of the students completely agree with the statement that they make plans for their life, followed by 19% and 13% in the next two point on the scale, 20% are on the neutral or negative end of that scale.
- **Trust in close people** who are close included responses to trusting people you work or study with, teachers, classmates and friends. Trust is greater towards friends (89%), but a significant percentage of students would not trust co-workers or school peers (21%), teachers (19%), and classmates (21%).
- **Trust in relatives** indicated that, as expected, trust is greater towards relatives (93%) or parents (91%).
- **Trust in people in general** shows a higher percentage of students who would not trust people who are poorer (37%), richer (42%), from other religion (34%) or ethnicity (39%), Mexicans in general (30%), community leaders (35%), and business leaders (38%).
- **Attitudes towards corruption** assessed agreement with public servants accepting bribes (13%), using institutional resources for their own benefit (21%), or for nepotism (39%).



- **Attitudes towards authoritarianism** assessed the agreement with the need of dictatorship in times of crisis (32%), the concentration of power in a single person as a way to promote order (34% agree), the approval of the president dissolving an oppositional congress (32% agree), and the justification dictatorships when they bring order and security (45%).
- **Attitudes towards** the role of government vis a vis media assessed agreement with government closing critical media (21%) and deciding what news can be published in order to maintain order (34%).
- **Perception that the rights of youth were respected** considered most students believed the Rights of youth are respected, particularly health (88%), education (87%) and nutrition (81%). Fewer participants saw respect for the right to express views (61%), a fair trial (57%) and not being a victim of violence (50%).
- **Interest in politics** includes views on interest in politics (45%) and how often do respondents follow political news (17% always, 46% sometimes).



Bronwyn Wood, Rosalyn Black

Performing Citizenship Down Under: Educating the Active Citizen*

In democracies such as Australia and New Zealand, education policy increasingly seeks to foster active citizens who are committed to social justice and change. Whilst many aspects of these initiatives are to be applauded for their commitment to empowering young people, in this paper we describe some of the ambiguities that attend young people's experiences of civic engagement and active citizenship. In doing so, we draw on Isin's (2008) reconceptualization of citizenship as something that is, above all, performed or enacted. Isin's focus is upon 'acts of citizenship' which he argues are best understood by examining their grounds, effects and consequences. Drawing on illustrations of young people's global and local citizenship actions in schools in Australia and New Zealand, we examine some of the contradictions and tensions that lie within the enactment of such 'performed' curricula. We conclude by reflecting on the opportunities that exist within school and community spaces for the active citizen to perform acts of citizenship.

Keywords:

citizenship education, acts of citizenship, youth, active citizens, participation

1 Introduction

The past two decades have seen an enormous upsurge of education policy interest in young people's civic engagement, with a trend towards more 'active' conceptions of citizenship education observed in many places (Kennedy, 2007; Kerr, 1999; Nelson & Kerr, 2006; Ross, 2008). As Ross (2012) writes, in recent years "the adjective 'active' has frequently been added to the term 'Citizenship Education'" (p. 7). This implies that active citizens are more sought after than passive ones:

while many politicians would settle for a passive citizen (the 'good citizen', who votes, subscribes to the state obeys the law), many others—including most progressive educators—would hope to empower young citizens, to critically engage with and seek to affect the course of social events (2012, p. 7).

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Despite this policy interest, there is little consensus about what active civic engagement looks like in practice, or the role of schooling in fostering it. At the simplest level, civic engagement implies formal participation in political processes and institutions as well as informal involvement in civic or civil organisations and activities. A growing body of critical literature is moving beyond such definitions, however, to consider what might constitute not only a more active, but a more *activist* civic engagement. Bennett and his colleagues, for example, distinguish between the 'dutiful' young citizen, who participates through traditional or conventional civic avenues, and the 'actualizing' citizen, who engages in forms of activism to promote social change in ways that reflect her personal values and beliefs (Bennett, Wells, & Rank, 2008). Westheimer and Kahne propose a spectrum of citizenship that ranges from the 'personally responsible citizen', who abides by the laws of the nation and may engage in activities for the public good, to the 'justice-oriented citizen', who "question[s], debate[s], and change[s] established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injustice over time" (2004, p. 240). In a similar way, Isin (2008; 2009) distinguishes between social actions which are already instituted for citizens to perform (such as voting, taxpaying and enlisting) and 'acts of citizenship' which break with routines, understandings and practices and serve to foster social justice and change, or to 'make a difference'. It is these latter actions that Isin characterises as those of an 'activist' citizen.

These emerging constructions of youth citizenship are important to note: they are part of a wider critical zeitgeist that challenges the restricted notions of youth citizenship that persist within education policy and practice and that points to the more transformative role that numerous young people are already playing both within and outside democratic institutions (e.g. Kallio &



Häkli, 2013; Harris et al., 2010; Martinez et al., 2012). As we explain later in this paper, however, such critical constructions bear little resemblance to the dominant prescriptions of education policy, which remain focused on what is better understood as an active rather an activist citizenship.

These prescriptions are increasingly pursued within the education policy of advanced democracies such as Australia and New Zealand as well as within the school initiatives that they authorise or support. Whilst many aspects of these initiatives are to be applauded for their commitment to empowering young people, in this paper we describe some of the ambiguities that attend young people's experiences of civic engagement and citizenship in the context of schooling. In doing so, we draw on Engin Isin's (2008) reconceptualization of citizenship as something that is, above all, performed. We begin by reviewing Isin's notion of 'performed' citizenship and consider how this could be used to analyse the increasingly 'active' citizenship components of curricula in Australia and New Zealand. We then examine two examples of how this curriculum has been implemented in schools at a local and global scale. We conclude by discussing some of the contradictions and tensions that lie within the enactment of such 'performed' curricula, and the questions this raises for opportunities for young people's to participate in 'acts of citizenship' which bring about social transformation and make a difference in society (Isin, 2009).

2 Performing citizenship

The requirement for young people to 'perform' their citizenship is part of a broader shift in education and public policy that expects citizens not simply to understand the ways in which civic society operates, but also to enact, embody and *perform* their understandings (Kohli, 1999). These changes have significantly affected the nature of citizenship education in schools. Nelson and Kerr (2006) attribute this to the impact of the relentless pace of change in the 21st century, which is compelling officials and educators to pose serious questions about the nature of the participation of citizens in civic society and the scale of their citizenship responsibilities. As a result, citizenship is increasingly defined not just in relation to *status*, but, crucially, in relation to "*citizenship as an active practice*" (Nelson & Kerr, 2006, p. 7 their emphasis).

In this paper we engage in particular with Isin's (2008; 2009) theorising of citizenship which articulates a vision of performed and enacted citizenship, one which constitutes citizenship as the "practices of claim-making citizens in and through various sites and scales" (2008, p. 16). As Isin notes, "critical studies of citizenship over the last two decades have taught us that what is important is not only that citizenship is a legal status but that it also involves practices of making citizens – social, political, cultural and symbolic" (2008, p. 17). He suggests that we need to expand our investigations to include 'acts of citizenship', or moments when, regardless of status and

substance, subjects constitute themselves as citizens – or (drawing on Arendt, 1951), as those to whom the right to have rights is due (p 18). This requires a focus on acts that may not even be considered political and an examination of not just the subject, but on that subject's interactions with others—based on the dialogical principle that "citizenship always involves otherness" (Isin, 2008, p. 19).

A focus on acts of citizenship moves beyond the simple 'performance' of an act, to an examination of the grounds, effects or consequences of acts of citizenship. This has important implications for our research into the citizenship of young people because it allows for opportunities to draw attention to acts which may not be considered political and that are carried out by young people who do not fit the 'status' of citizen as a result of their age (typically, under-18 year olds do not have the right to vote and participate in the processes of democracy in the way that adults do). Moreover, it provides a framework for analysis of actions which "transgress dominant and local constructions of citizenship and childhood [thus] contesting the justice of existing balances of rights, responsibilities and status" (Larkins, 2014, p. 19).

Isin's work is part of a growing body of scholarship that is concerned with formulating "a new vocabulary of citizenship" (Isin, 2009, p. 368), one that is "geographically responsive" (Isin, 2009, p. 368). Significantly, as Isin argues, it draws attention to the *nature* of citizenship performance, enabling us to question the type of acts young people may perform within curriculum and policy contexts; the forms, modes and sites of their citizenship acts; and the effects of those acts:

An enactment inevitably creates a scene where there are selves and others defined in relation to each other. These are not fixed identities but fluid subject positions in and out of which subjects move. (Isin, 2008, p. 18-19).

Recasting citizenship as enactment also enables greater attention to the acts that constitute individuals as citizens: "rather than asking 'who is the citizen?' the question becomes 'what makes the citizen?'" (Isin, 2009, p. 383). By the same token, it enables us to consider under what conditions the citizen may be 'unmade' (Nyers, 2006).

Using Isin's holistic vision of a performed and 'lived' citizenship, we want to draw into question the nature of citizenship 'performance' as it is prescribed by education policy. In particular, we want to consider the ways in which this performance is implemented within education settings and the implications this may have for young people. Prior research in this area alerts us to the fact that schools are difficult places for young people to participate as active citizens for a number of reasons. Three reasons for this which were of particular significance in the schools in which we were researching: these are outlined below.



First, the utilitarian goals of schools, which are part of broader neoliberal agendas for young people, have a primary aim of producing self-regulating, economically autonomous and employable students (Harris, 2006; Pykett, 2009; Wolmuth, 2009). Thus, the requirement to ‘perform’ citizenship could potentially be reduced to narrow frameworks of citizenship action which are more closely aligned with employability and compliance rather than transformative and critical forms of citizenship action which aim to make a difference in society.

Second, there is also a likelihood that policy requirements for young people to perform citizenship could be derived from largely adult-centred notions of citizenship, thus overlooking how young people themselves view and understand and ‘perform’ their citizenship. The tendency to focus on performing formal citizenship acts such as voting, representation and signing petitions—what Norris (2007) calls ‘mainstream’ politics—also could obscure the very ‘ordinary’ ways that different young people live their citizenship (Harris, Wyn, & Younes, 2010).

Third, we are concerned that the universalising characteristics of these policy requirements overlook the power constraints on young people within specific educational and community contexts which may limit their autonomy as citizens. This is especially pertinent within schools where high degrees of social control operate to regulate and monitor young people and their actions (Giroux, 2003).

Our discussion of our own research later in this paper illustrates the currency of these tensions within schools. This raises a number of questions. Will young people simply perform citizenship acts in order to achieve assessment credits and add to their curriculum vitae (Brooks, 2007), thus making schools the training grounds of the corporate workplace (Giroux, 2003)? Or will citizenship education offer opportunities to develop citizens who can also critique existing structures in society, and participate through their ‘lived’ experiences as active citizens in transforming aspects of society which matter to them? We begin our exploration of these questions with an examination of the policies for active citizenship that have been introduced in both Australia and New Zealand, and the sites that such policies define as spaces for young people’s citizenship.

3 Educating the active citizen down under in Australia and New Zealand

In both Australia and New Zealand, education policy locates young people’s active citizenship within global, national and local spheres. In Australia, the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, which represents the current blueprint for Australian schooling, describes the imperative for schools to prepare young people to be both “global and local citizens” (MCEETYA, 2008, p.9). The new Australian Curriculum extends and amplifies this prescription, describing citizenship not only as “the condition of belonging to social, religious, political or community

groups, locally, nationally and globally” (ACARA, 2012, p. 2), but as a condition that expects this feeling of belonging to be translated into practice and action. The Shaping Paper for Civics and Citizenship makes this emphasis explicit:

Over the past two decades in Australia and internationally, there has been a broadening of the concepts, processes, and practices in Civics and Citizenship education. In particular there has been an increased emphasis on the role of active citizenship, both as explicit content and as a key outcome of Civics and Citizenship education (ACARA, 2012, p. 3).

The expectation of such policy texts is that schools should enable this more active form of citizenship to take place. The Shaping Paper stresses that “students in schools are citizens but they need opportunities to build their knowledge and understanding and experience to become *active adult citizens*” (ACARA, 2012, p. 5, our emphasis). It describes the role of the school in enabling young people to be “active and empowered citizens” who “apply democratic principles, practise behaviours and [...] actively engage in practical citizenship activities within schools, in the community and online” (ACARA, 2012, p. 5). This places the responsibility firmly on schools to provide these active citizenship-affirming opportunities.

Similar to Australia, New Zealand’s latest curriculum also advocates for a more active conception of citizenship across the whole curriculum and specifically within the social sciences. This inclusion of citizenship as an active process “for all young people both through the curriculum, in the culture of the school and in the wider community beyond” (Nelson & Kerr, 2006, p. 9) has been noted internationally and locally (Electoral Commission (NZ), 2007; Nelson & Kerr, 2006). At the heart of this curriculum is a vision of young people who are active participants in their learning and in society – “confident, connected, actively involved, and lifelong learners” (p 8). More active conceptions of citizenship through “participating and contributing” (p 12) are also supported in the new section on key competencies and most specifically in the learning area of the social sciences where students will “explore how societies work and how they themselves, can participate and *take action as critical, informed, and responsible citizens*” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 17, our emphasis). Taking this a step further, the social studies curriculum assessment for students in Years 11-13 (ages 15-18) now requires students to ‘take personal social action’ to gain credits for their National Certificate in Educational Achievement.

Like the Australian curriculum, the scale of active citizenship in this curriculum includes an expectation that students will participate in local and national communities but also extends to participation in ‘global communities’. This vision aspires to develop young people as “international citizens,” “members of communities”, active participants and “contributors to



the well-being of New Zealand—social, economic, and environmental” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 8). Promoting students as active, global citizens is a theme that is similarly endorsed in the named principles of this document which include citizenship as one of four significant future-focused issues (along with sustainability, enterprise and globalisation).¹

Yet, in both nations, teachers were grappling with the nature and scale of these curriculum requirements and interpreting and implementing them in different ways (Black, 2011b; Wood, 2012a). For example, teachers in some New Zealand lower socio-economic schools focused on local issues and social action, while the higher socio-economic school communities had more of a global focus (Wood, 2012a; 2013). Teachers in some Australian lower socio-economic schools have similarly been found to emphasise the local community as a site for young people’s citizenship performance (Black, 2010). This draws into question which forms of active citizenship are awarded the greatest symbolic ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu, 1984) in society, and whether neoliberal and economic versions of citizenship will favour the agile global citizen-worker over the active citizen.

In light of these increasing requirements for active citizenship, we need to examine the nature of young people’s citizenship acts within educational contexts. In particular, we need to find ways to support those acts that might constitute not only active but activist citizenship, acts that promote social transformation. In the following section, we draw from our experiences of research in schools in Australia and New Zealand where more active citizenship curricula were being implemented. Each study recruited a purposive sample of case study schools, two in Australia and four in New Zealand, which were implementing active citizenship curricula (see Black, 2011b; Wood, 2012b). Both studies applied an immersive, ethnographic methodology to the exploration and critical analysis of the implementation of these curricula, drawing on semi-structured interviews and field observation of school leaders, teachers and students as well as on school documentary and archival material in relation to the development and implementation of the curricula. Both studies analysed data within each case study and across case studies to develop what was unique and comparable across these sites. Such a comparison can highlight the “contextual sensitivity” (Silverman, 2006, p. 17) of interpretations of concepts such as ‘participation’ and ‘citizenship’, recognising that these concepts are likely to have a variety of meanings in different contexts (McLeod & Yates, 2006).

Whilst there were many ‘success’ stories emerging from these schools, in these illustrations from our respective studies we expose some aspects which were perhaps more troubling, highlighting some of the tensions surrounding the required performance of young people’s citizenship. These illustrations focus on two different scales of citizenship. Bronwyn’s research examines student participation in a ‘global’ project which

required fundraising in one of her New Zealand schools; Rosalyn’s research explores how students performed their citizenship through local projects enacted within their immediate geographic community in Australia.

4 ‘You just can’t go into a country like that and just change things’: Performing citizenship globally

New Zealand young people from Bronwyn’s research illustrated some of the tensions surrounding young people’s education as ‘active’ citizens and how these are played out in the context of a classroom. The following illustration is drawn from one New Zealand high school which had a teacher with a strong commitment to social change which was embedded in her social studies programmes. The primary way that students in this school were encouraged to respond was through fund raising and collecting donations. This included, for example, selling friendship bracelets to raise money for Voluntary Services Abroad (VSA), collecting food for local food banks, holding an End Poverty conscious-raising school assembly, and writing submissions to the Council on local issues. The Head of Department had also initiated a field trip to a developing country for social studies students to gain international exposure and take social action by contributing to humanitarian work in this country. The students, staff and parents were very supportive of these initiatives, which were largely ‘safe’ forms of taking social action.

The students, who had been studying social studies for a number of years, had a strong sense that ‘social action’² was an integral part of that subject. For example, the following students (17-18 years) described why they thought students should take social action as part of their social studies programmes:

ITMaster:³ You’ve got to put into action what you’ve learned. You can’t just *sit* there, learn and not do anything. It’s kind of boring. I think that’s why people leave school. They just *sit*, they *learn*, but they don’t have any action. (18 years, male)

Bella: Also I think, if they start us off at this age doing things is a very structured school environment, then we can see how easy it is to do something. And then we can use that later on in life. (18 years, female)

Their discussion showed a commitment to both ‘performative’ notions of social action and of learning and showed a strong alignment with the curriculum documents which advocate for participatory and active citizenship. As Bella states, the logic that ‘they start us off at this age’ showed compliance with the government’s desire for young people to practise for long term civic participation.

However, there were also glimpses of some tensions between the largely acceptable forms of social action and students’ own critique of these citizenship actions that emerged during the classroom observations and interviews. Their teacher had introduced a charity led by



Craig Kielburger, *Free the Children*, which he had started when he was 12 years old as she hoped to inspire her students with the thought that they too could make a difference at a young age. The focus of Kielburger's charity is on child labour and actions included lobbying governments in Pakistan and India for stricter punishments for child labour and Kielburger himself has even raided child labour factories to rescue them. The students initially had discussed Craig Keilburger in their interviews with me, using him as an example of someone who took social action:

Claire: [Social action is] like taking action about something either has affected you or something you believe strongly. (18 years, female)

Leaf: Just like that video Keilburger guy (Craig) – he took social action. (18 years, female)

Wonder woman: [Social action is] getting other people aware and trying to help them, the problem. (18 years, female)

Yet alongside this affirmation of his citizenship actions, students were also critical of his interventionist actions. The following 'everyday' conversation (out of ear-shot of the teacher, recorded on an audio device during their café-style discussions) showed how they were grappling with contested and complex understandings of citizenship within dialogical contexts:

Wonderwoman: When we were watching that video yesterday [referring to Craig Kielburger and raids on child labour camps] and he was saying something about going in and starting a war to sort everything out.

Leaf: You just can't go into a country like that and just change things. Cos you gotta think about the way, for how many years that they've done that for...

Wonderwoman: Yeah, it's part of their culture.

Claire: Cos of the way things have been done, it becomes part of their culture.

Leaf: So you have to assess the situation and think about what you're doing. It may not be done overnight, but it may take multiple generations before a society is changed. Because you've got to slowly integrate it in and teach it.

This discussion shows a somewhat unsettled response to his 'social action' which they felt was lacking in respect for local cultures and rather heavy-handed. This dialogue serves to 'rupture' (Isin, 2008) the tidy image of Kielburger as a living example of social action which they provided earlier as these young people begin to write the script of how they view citizenship acts. Isin (2009) states

that creative acts which break or rupture the given order, practice of habitus are examples of 'acts of citizenship' which reveal the 'activist' citizen, rather than the more predictable active citizen. Such discussions collectively constitute sites for citizenship formation as they are moments in which young people recognise their political consciousness and negotiate difference, identity and power (Elwood & Mitchell, 2012; Wood, 2013).

Yet, within the context of an educational experience that exhorts Kielburger as an exemplary citizen, their dialogue undermined the expected patterns of the 'active' citizen—which in this case would be to collect money to promote his cause against child labour and to advocate for *Free the Children* as a lobby group. The fact they didn't share this view with their teacher indicates that they may not have felt it was a 'safe' discussion to hold in this classroom. Their discussions also highlighted much more 'everyday' understanding of citizenship than their teachers expressed (Wood, 2012a). These were often tentative, ambiguous and questioning of adult-defined conceptions of citizenship showing how their citizenship understandings were dynamic and under formation, forged through debates and discussions with peers. Moreover, despite the positive examples of a young citizen (Kielburger), the students felt restricted in the abilities to take action as young citizens. This stemmed from perceptions in their regional town that young people were 'trouble' and also the very real structural and perceptual limitations they felt as a result of their youthfulness and lack of power, as Bella describes:

I think, not so much the limitations, but the limitations that you think you have. Like, you think in your mind 'Oh, but I'm young. There is only a certain amount of influence that I can actually have. I can't change government policy or something like that.'

This example highlights the tension of creating the active citizen within classroom spaces – just how much freedom do young people have to enact their citizenship within school and community spaces? It also highlights the criticality of these students, and their way they were constructing their citizenship identities and subjectivities.

5 'It makes us believe that we're like bigger than we actually are': Performing citizenship locally

In Rosalyn's research, young people were interviewed at two Australian schools that had implemented active citizenship which encouraged students to design and implement social action projects that 'make a difference' within their own local communities, communities that are characterised by socioeconomic exclusion. As in New Zealand, these Australian programmes reflected the policy expectation that young people begin their civic participation early, as one male student describes:

[The programme] showed us that age isn't a restriction to like... changing stuff. It's not all left to adults. [Teacher] brought that up, he's like 'it doesn't



have to start when you're like 40, when you've actually got a seat of power, it can actually start from when you're really young', so it gives you the feeling that you've actually got a bit of power and a voice.

This feeling was shared by many of his peers. At each school, the students' belief that they had enacted or enabled needed change within their communities was one that brought them a deep personal satisfaction:

And you walk into the community, and you see something that's been changed because it's something that you did in a small classroom, you feel good about it because 'hey look, I started that, we made it grow' and you feel confident that you can go out and say 'that's what we were doing'.

Their performed local citizenship enabled these young people to construct a sense of themselves as individuals whose voices were not only heard but, to mix sensory metaphors, seen to be heard. In so doing, it provided them with important resources for recognition (Fraser, 2000). It also enabled them to achieve greater recognition within their schools as "competent beings who exercise agency in their own lives and in their communities" (Hoffmann-Ekstein et al., 2008, p. 1). Yet, at the same time, these school-based experiences directly contrasted with their experiences of being citizens in the specific communities in which they live and in which they are more frequently associated with 'trouble' and 'risk' than with autonomous and transformative citizenship. The following exchange elaborates on these young people's normative experience of suspicion and distrust within their community:

Student: It happens in lots of places. I just walked into a shop, saw nothing that I liked, turned around and walked out and had some lady chase me half way down the shopping centre to check my bag.
[...]

Student: Like, if one person in [town] does something wrong, it reflects on everyone our age.

Student: And people judge people for just being a teenager, they judge you and they think all teenagers are the same, but we're not, we're all different.

Similar youth experiences are familiar from other studies (e.g. Davies et al. 2012; Warwick et al. 2012; Zeldin & Topitzes, 2002), which report that adults in low socioeconomic communities are slow to believe that young people are willing or able to contribute to the task of building those communities. The discursive promise of both programmes was that these young people's performance of citizenship within the community will change this belief: "They won't think you're just another kid, you've actually done something to say that you do care about this world" (student). Such statements

illustrate just some of the tensions that surround the construction of young people's citizenship within education policy and school practice and its enactment, or performance, within the complex socio-geographic nature of the places in which young people live, especially where those places are further complicated by socioeconomic disadvantage (Black, 2011a). They are also illustrative of the power constraints that may be experienced by young people within the everyday setting of the local community.

This community was the site of complex and contradictory experiences for the young people at both schools. On the one hand, their citizenship performance was constructed as a means by which they could contribute to the community through the curriculum and gain both a greater sense of belonging and greater recognition from its members. On the other, it was constructed as a means by which these same young people could transcend the constraints that were seen to attend that same community, constraints that are seen to be both psychological and physical. It was also constructed as a means by which they could achieve a degree of social mobility that the local community, with its "everyday geographies" (Dickinson et al., 2008, p. 101) of high youth employment, was not seen to offer its young people. It was seen as a means by which, as one school principal explained, these young people could learn to become "well informed citizens who've got a job that they're happy with". In both cases, it was the curriculum, and the students' experience of citizenship within that curriculum, that was to be the means of achieving these various transformations:

... they've kind of learnt to think outside, you know, and to be bigger than they are, that they're not just going to be stuck in [town name] for the rest of their lives. (Teacher)

Other tensions arose from within the school itself. At both schools, the students' experience of active citizenship was seen as a means of endowing them with some of the opportunities that they were perceived to lack by virtue of their socio-geographic circumstances, as one teacher explained:

... their world is what experiences they have had and I suppose for many of them it's not very much, particularly in this area that's a bit remote and some of them don't have the family backgrounds to be able to do a lot of, you know, haven't travelled very far. We get kids every year that we take to the Year Nine camp that have never been to the city.

Such aims are well-intentioned, but they also have other and more utilitarian dimensions. We note earlier that active citizenship as an educational intervention has been charged with producing self-regulating neoliberal subjects as much as enabling transformative acts of citizenship. In schools where socioeconomic disad-



vantage is an issue, the pedagogies of active citizenship may also be designed to engage, or reengage, students in schooling. This is most often directed towards middle years students, a cohort which has been described as having a “5D relationship to school”, one within which they are “dissatisfied, disengaged, disaffected, disrespectful, and disruptive” (Kenway & Bullen, 2007, p. 31).

The experience of active citizenship has been shown to give young people a stronger sense of membership in the school and a stronger sense of themselves as learners (Atweh, Bland, Carrington, & Cavanagh, 2007; McInerney, 2009). It has also been shown to improve the educational engagement of young people who are believed to be most likely to become disengaged from school (Stokes & Turnbull, 2008). At the same time, its use as a strategy to ensure this engagement reflects the ‘blurring’ of the objectives of citizenship action within the curriculum. At both schools, the introduction of an active citizenship programme was partly motivated by the need to promote pedagogical approaches that improved student engagement. In the words of one teacher, “we had to design something that’s going to re-engage and re-enthuse”. The school leader at the same school was equally frank about this aspect of the programme:

The biggest thing that I’ve been pushing and I know others have been pushing is engagement. Because the kids here, and when I say this it’s not all of them, but there’s a fair percentage of kids who just aren’t interested in education, and not only that, their parents aren’t.

Such curricula may well meet their purposes: indeed, the consistent view of educators at both schools was that the introduction of an active citizenship curriculum had significantly enhanced student engagement. At the same time, however, they add to the tensions that already attend young people’s education for citizenship because they risk reducing young people’s acts of citizenship to little more than means to an educational end. Even while they are employed to enable genuine transformative change for these young people and their communities, they are also used to create more active, well-behaved learners who are more socially mobile and employable. In the following discussion, we examine these tensions in greater depth.

6 Discussion

Performing citizenship, as Isin conceptualises it, has great potential to embrace a more embodied notion of citizenship. Our research supports this: both studies offer many examples of how both teachers and students found authentic opportunities for young people to make a difference in their communities and at wider scales. Such actions were perceived as important by students – “you’ve actually got a bit of power and a voice” – because they contrasted with many of their normative

experiences as young people in schools and in communities.

However, our research also suggests that there are a number of aspects that relate to the schooling and classroom context which constrain these same opportunities. These include narrow definitions and minimal interpretations of citizenship actions. Bronwyn’s research demonstrated how the teacher’s presentation of an ‘active’ citizen was one that the students found difficult to respect and relate to. Yet their criticism of this model citizen was made quietly and to each other rather than to the teacher, suggesting that they feared that this type of critique was discouraged in class. Pykett (2009) suggests that political critique needs to focus on differences or asymmetries in social enablement and constraint which delimit possible social action; specifically on relations of domination. In the context of school settings, the asymmetries of power are apparent: students are obliged to follow the directives of the teacher or consequences are forthcoming. ‘Active’ citizenship pedagogies therefore are embedded within this highly stratified context and need specific consideration for how they can be potentially coercive, manipulative or limiting on student freedom.

For this same reason, when student *do* act out in ways that are perhaps unexpected or defiant, these need to be read and understood within the context of such spaces. While the students’ critique in Bronwyn’s illustration may be seen as insignificant, it nonetheless constituted an ‘act of citizenship’ as, through these dialogical actions, young people challenged the existing relations they had with citizenship and looked to redefine what citizenship meant to them (Larkins, 2014). In Isin’s (2008) words, their acts of citizenship showed that they *already* were performing ‘ways of becoming political’ (p 39) through their actions and ways of reacting with others.

In Rosalyn’s research, the boundaries between the young person as active citizen and the young person as student (or citizen-learner) had become blurred, with the citizenship curriculum being simultaneously used to address issues of student disengagement and poor behaviour even while it appealed to the rhetoric of active citizenship and provided the means for young people to experience or enact that citizenship. This blurred citizenship curriculum undermined opportunities for more transformative social change as the programme attempted to meet conflicting aims (Wolmuth, 2009). Such blurring suggests that even while young people are being encouraged to see themselves as actors who can ‘make a difference’, they themselves are the subjects of educational interventions that seek to make a difference to their own behaviours and to encourage to meet the terms of a more normative identity: that of the good student, the young person whose actions are defined and measured by others (Smyth, 2011).

This tendency to assimilate active citizenship within broader instrumentalist agendas remains an ongoing concern, especially as schools in both Australia and New Zealand are increasingly subject to policy scrutiny and



measurement in regards to their ability to ensure competitive levels of student engagement, attainment and achievement (for evidence from Australia, see Lingard, 2010). In recent years, this scrutiny has also become a public activity. There is concern that this escalation of measurement and testing regimes is beginning to be associated with increases in the degree of stress, anxiety, pressure and fear experienced by young people. There is also evidence that this is having a negative effect on schools' capacity to deliver quality teaching and learning opportunities which can lead to the closing down of spaces within the school curriculum for more participatory or democratic forms of education (Polesel, Dulfer, & Turnbull, 2012).

In concluding we return to Isin's (2008) distinction between activist citizens who "engage in writing scripts and creating the scene", in contrast with active citizens who "follow scripts and participate in scenes that are already created" (p 38). Our concern with current educational and curriculum policies which promote 'performed' citizenship in school centre upon this distinction: the model of citizenship which is permitted and enacted within school is likely to follow pre-organised scripts that are tightly structured along timelines to meet assessment deadlines and pre-established outcomes—an *active* citizen model. When young people did critique this model (Bronwyn's examples), or struggle to meet the more maximal - interpretations of citizenship, or move beyond spatially inscribed characteristics of youth (Rosalyn's examples), our research shows that there was very little room for teachers or students to engage with critical dialogue, or seek creative responses beyond the planned curriculum, thus constraining the space for the *activist* citizen to exist. This was exacerbated further by the contrasting messages young people were getting through citizenship curricula which told them they could 'make a difference' and their own communities which told them they were 'risky' and 'trouble-makers'. Such mixed messages can lead to disillusionment rather than empowerment.

To conclude, focusing on performed citizenship enables a recasting of young people's citizenship as a situated, relational and conditional practice, one that is both spatially and temporally precarious and subject to change depending on the context in which the individual finds him or herself. This attends to Isin's argument for more "geographically responsive" (Isin, 2009, p. 368) vocabulary of citizenship, which takes far greater consideration of context, place and power. We surmise that unless the spaces for performing acts of citizenship within school programmes and community settings themselves are called into question, there will be very few opportunities for both teachers and young people to participate in acts of citizenship which break routines, understandings and practices (Isin, 2009). This highlights the need to specifically address the aspects undermine the capacity of young people as citizens to 'make a difference' through the programmes they are offered in schools and communities. This is a challenging task for

civic educators as it requires recognising the complex ecologies of young people's lives as well as facilitating active, reflective and reflexive civic opportunities (Warwick et al., 2012). Yet it is one that deserves attention if the goal of implementing active citizenship policies which require young people to 'perform' their citizenship is to be taken seriously.

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Endnotes

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¹ Citizenship education is defined in the New Zealand Curriculum within these future focused themes as "exploring what it means to be a citizen and to contribute to the development and well-being of society" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 39).

² The term social action has been used specifically in New Zealand social studies curricula to convey actions taken to participate in the life of the community.

³ Students self-selected their pseudonyms for the project.

Peter Brett, Damon Thomas

Discovering Argument: Linking Literacy, Citizenship Education, and Persuasive Advocacy

This paper explores persuasive writing and what more might be done to help equip young people with the written literacy tools to be effective participants in civic activism. Firstly, we argue from an Australian (and Tasmanian) context that there may be merit in teachers and students re-visiting some of the advice from classical rhetoric around the discovery of arguments. Secondly, we analyse challenges that 14 year old students face in responding to Australia's national literacy tests which include a persuasive writing task – and exemplify this section with evidence drawn from a data source of outstanding student responses. We conclude by critically reviewing and augmenting the literacy strategies suggested in a representative citizenship education teaching text, and suggest a tentative stepped model for supporting high quality persuasive writing in the context of active citizenship and democratic engagement.

Keywords:

civics and citizenship education; literacy; persuasive writing; classical rhetoric; civic activism

1 Introduction

Possessing the capacity to write persuasively fosters active participation and access to power in democracies. As Crowhurst (1990) explained, “the literate, educated person is expected to be able to articulate a position on important matters so as to persuade colleagues, fellow citizens, governments, and bureaucrats” (p. 349). Advocacy, campaigning, and taking informed action are at the heart of effective citizenship education. Moreover, it is important for active citizens to be able to engage critically with ideas and proposals for which a range of public persuasive stakeholders and organizations are hoping to garner support. However, the multiple literacy challenges faced by young people in developing their agency as active citizens should not be underestimated.

This article's focus is upon written advocacy—strategies and forms of writing practised by young people to increase their capacity for participation in a democratic society. Experiential, active citizenship will usually require some kind of marshalling of evidence and making a case for change in writing. Film-making, oral presentations to community leaders, and online, web-based advocacy can also represent highly effective forms

of campaigning for young people - but these will also usually require the formulation of a written script of some kind. The purpose of the article is fourfold: firstly, to re-capitulate the kinds of possible argument structures from classical rhetoric which teachers might usefully introduce to students; secondly, to analyse the features of high quality persuasive writing undertaken by high attaining Tasmanian students in NAPLAN testing contexts and how conclusions arising from this work might move teachers and students away from arid, technician interpretations of writing to persuade; thirdly, to identify how teachers currently attempt to structure, scaffold, and build students' persuasive writing, reviewing a representative student textbook writing frame; and finally, we propose a provisional alternative model and repertoire of teaching strategies which draws upon classical rhetorical wisdom.

Concerns around literacy are high in the Australian island state of Tasmania, where the authors of this article are based. A recent report by the Australian Bureau of Statistics has indicated that half of all Tasmanian citizens aged 15 to 74 are functionally illiterate (ABS, 2013). They struggle to read or draw low level inferences from a newspaper. Of all Australian states and territories, Tasmania has the highest rate of students who leave school in Year Ten (aged 16). 47 per cent of 15 year old Tasmanians failed to achieve the Australian national minimum standard of English, compared to 36 per cent nationally in the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN] tests (Australian Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2012a). Low levels of attainment feed through into the highest levels of youth unemployment in Australia: 20.5 per cent of 15-24 year olds in the north west of Tasmania were classified as unemployed in March 2014 (Brotherhood of St. Laurence, 2014). Low levels of literacy achievement correlate with economic, civic, and democratic deficits: “Tasmania ranks at the bottom among Australian states on virtually every dimension of economic, social, and

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cultural performance” (West, 2013, p. 50), including lowest incomes, highest rate of chronic disease, poorest longevity, highest rates of smoking and greatest obesity. Schools and teachers cannot provide magic bullet solutions to these entrenched socio-economic realities, but education constitutes a central component of any enhancement of young people’s future societal choices.

A range of thoughtful academic authorities have recently drawn attention to the interconnections between literacy and civic activism, including in rural and regional areas of the world such as Tasmania (See Green & Corbett, 2013; Donehower, Hogg, & Schell, 2011). Place and location make a difference to how relationships are likely to be forged between citizenship education and literacy; meaningful and authentic active citizenship projects aim to engage young people in real problems and issues in their localities before making broader connections to national and global contexts (Cormack, 2013). Young people’s social justice goals can be married to literacy ambitions and critical literacy pedagogies (Kerkham & Comber, 2013). Tasmania is representative of rural and regional areas throughout the developed world in being ripe for pedagogical innovation that links transformational thinking about advocacy with high quality literacy practices. Learning to write persuasively is a ‘democracy sustaining approach to education’ just as much as learning to talk effectively about the issues of the day is a cornerstone of a healthy democracy (Hess, 2009, p. 5). We argue here - drawing upon traditions of classical rhetoric - that a focus upon the discovery of ideas, and arrangement and style structures might help teachers to equip young people with the written literacy tools to articulate ideas more powerfully and thereby support effective civic activism.

Literacy imperatives are also citizenship imperatives (Freire & Macedo, 1987). The capacity to think critically and act in relation to social and political concerns underpins effective citizenship education¹. Evidence suggests that young Australians have a clear sense of justice or fairness: for example, 73 per cent of the 6,400 Year Ten students from 312 schools surveyed as part of the Civics and Citizenship National Assessment Program in 2010 considered it ‘very important’ or ‘quite important’ to take part in activities promoting human rights, while 78 per cent of the same cohort considered it ‘very important’ or ‘quite important’ to participate in activities to benefit the local community (ACARA, 2011b, p. 65). However, a less explored aspect of this field is the extent to which literacy practices in school settings currently support effective education for citizenship (although Sally Humphrey has been a notable contributor in this area (Humphrey, 2008 & 2013).

Disciplinary boundary crossing can be mutually beneficial in enabling rich exploration of both language and ideas. However, research evidence suggests teachers find such boundary crossing relatively challenging. In England, in the early years of the implementation of a new Citizenship curriculum, inspection evidence accumulated that cross-curricular approaches to

citizenship were often lacking in terms of both definition and rigour. The Office for Standards in Education [OFSTED] (2006) found that a permeation or infusion model was generally unsuccessful in terms of promoting high quality citizenship learning: “While it should be acknowledged that citizenship can be taught through other subjects and can be of benefit to them, cross-curricular work in most cases results in an uneasy and often unsuccessful compromise” (p. 23). Nevertheless, the animating idea prompting the authors’ collaboration was to explore how Civics and Citizenship teachers and English teachers might build professional bridges and engage in some cross-fertilization of thinking about how young people construct persuasive texts. We argue here that there is scope for deeper and more theoretically informed literacy practices in civics and citizenship education teaching contexts, and that there is also value in English teachers at all levels seeking out the kinds of authentic writing contexts which can arise naturally from citizenship-rich classrooms.

2 The writing challenge

There is no shortage of advice coming from authoritative sources on how to raise standards of achievement in students’ writing (e.g. Freebody, 2007; Graham, MacArthur & Fitzgerald, 2013; Beard et. al., 2009). ACARA has also disseminated relevant material on this topic to complement the implementation of the Australian Curriculum, which includes a new English syllabus and a cross-curricular focus on literacy (‘General Capability – Literacy’). Specialist organizations such as the Australian Literacy Educators’ Association (ALEA) and the Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA) also provide invaluable guidance (e.g. Derewianka, 2012; Holliday, 2010). Knowledge about writing – and the capacity to do so effectively - is only complete with understandings of the complex actions in which writers engage as they create texts.

Writing is highly challenging for many young people. They have to:

- Discover what they want to say and select the right material to keep answers relevant to the topic - with the added challenge in citizenship education contexts that the political context of contemporary issues may well represent unfamiliar territory;
- Research a topic, synthesising and summa-rising a range of information in ways that are meaningful—with citizenship education contexts throwing in the complication that the subject matter may be contested, controversial or polarizing (McAvoy & Hess, 2013);
- Organize their ideas into a structure that allows for a logical argument to be developed
- this can pose difficulties when they are unfamiliar with or unengaged by dry institutional or structural ‘Civics’ subject content;



- Distinguish between general points and the particular points that relate to the contemporary issue under investigation: They need to balance 'big points'—often the first sentence of a paragraph—with 'particular' material (e.g. details and examples that support the 'big points');
- Write using appropriate types of sentences, syntax and spelling;
- Know the right words to link ideas together (sentence starters and connectives) and develop an increasingly sophisticated 'language of discourse' including, for example, generalised participants, complex noun groups and nominalisation, complex sentence structures, and the deployment of a variety of rhetorical devices (Counsell, 1997; Rowe & Edwards, 2007).

Successful advocacy also requires: knowledge, the discovery and arrangement of arguments, confidence, research, perseverance, and dialogue with individuals, institutions or organizations with the capacity to pull levers of change. Moreover, the 'grammar of persuasion' is complex, and it takes time for students to develop control of the language resources and stylistic devices used for arguing a case (Derewianka & Jones, 2012; O'Neill, 2012; Humphrey & Robinson, 2013). It should be noted that current theoretical underpinnings in the *Australian Curriculum: English* that are explicit about written grammar are drawn from understandings of functional grammar (e.g., Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Moreover, useful persuasive writing frameworks have been developed for teachers through the systematic functional linguistics (SFL) tradition (see Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Humphrey et al., 2010; Humphrey & Robinson, 2013). While this tradition presents many relevant descriptions of language resources that contribute to the persuasiveness of any text, this article is conceived to complement and enhance understandings about persuasive writing using ideas and structural frames derived from classical rhetoric. Young writers must have command of a wide repertoire of possible argumentation strategies, and be aware of the contexts in which different strategies can most appropriately be applied.

3 The classical rhetorical tradition

The founding father of classical rhetoric—Aristotle—defined it as “the technique of discovering the persuasive aspects of any given subject-matter” (Lawson-Tancred, 2004, p. 65). Orators followed a set of principles to persuade audiences about the truth of an issue, or to act in a certain way. Classical rhetoric was further developed in Ancient Rome, where scholars such as Cicero and Quintilian refined a pedagogical approach grounded in Aristotelian theory (Nelson & Kinneavy, 2003). This approach separated Aristotle’s rhetoric into five parts for pedagogical purposes, known as the five canons.

The principles that make up the five canons form a cognitive model of argument that can be followed by

speakers and writers to construct and deliver arguments on any topic. In the traditional Latin, the five canons are *Inventio*, *Dispositio*, *Elocutio*, *Memoria*, and *Pronuntiatio*, which in English translate as *Invention/Discovery*, *Arrangement*, *Style*, *Memory*, and *Delivery* (Corbett & Connors, 1999). A brief description of each canon was provided by Cicero (Rackham, 1942), who stated a public speaker:

“...must first hit upon what to say (*Invention*); then manage and marshal his discoveries, not merely in orderly fashion, but with a discriminating eye for the exact weight as it were of each argument (*Arrangement*); next go on to array them in the adornments of style (*Style*); after that keep them guarded in his memory (*Memory*); and in the end deliver them with effect and charm (*Delivery*)” (p. 142).

This still represents accessible advice to students in contemporary classrooms. For persuasive writing, only the first three canons are relevant, as the principles of *Memory* and *Delivery* do not come into play for written discourse. According to this model, the first step in constructing a persuasive text is to invent or discover arguments. Before compelling arguments can be marshalled, speakers and writers must first have something to write about.

To assist speakers and writers to discover matter for their persuasive texts, theorists of classical rhetoric devised a number of lines of argument known as topics, which ‘suggested material from which proofs could be made’ (Corbett & Connors, 1999, p. 19). Aristotle outlined common topics: a stock of general arguments that could be used on any occasion, and special topics: specific arguments appropriate to three persuasive genres: deliberative discourse, forensic discourse and epideictic discourse. Deliberative discourse was used to persuade others to do something or to accept a point of view, forensic discourse was used to determine the legality of an action, and epideictic discourse was used to praise individuals or groups (Kennedy, 1999).

Deliberative discourse—also referred to as hortative discourse—is “occasioned by, and created in response to, a community’s need to make a decision” (Markel, 2009, p. 5). Thus civics and citizenship education generally tends to privilege this form of writing. At the heart of the discovery of argument is the notion of ‘the common good’ and identification of worthy or advantageous ways forward. To persuade others to take some future action, a persuasive writer “aims at establishing the expediency or the harmfulness of a proposed course of action; if he urges its acceptance, he does so on the ground that it will do good; if he urges its rejection, he does so on the ground that it will do harm” (Kennedy 2007, p. 6).

Aristotle also identified three artistic proofs, commonly referred to as the three appeals. Effective persuasive speakers and writers boost their own credibility by appealing to *ethos*; they trigger emotional responses in



their audiences by appealing to pathos; and they highlight the logic in their arguments by appealing to logos. The three appeals are now explored in more depth, beginning with appeals to ethos.

Aristotle (Lawson-Tancred, 2004) described appealing to ethos as “proof from character produced whenever the speech is given in such a way as to render the speaker worthy of credence” (p. 74). Nelson and Kinneavy (2003) stated that “directly or indirectly, the establishment of credibility is paramount; if the writer is not believed, the rest of the speech is wasted on the audience” (p. 792). This is one reason why teachers advise students to integrate examples, details, and the voices of experts into their texts, as their credibility and trustworthiness enhances the students’ arguments. Appeals to ethos serve to demonstrate how responsible, faithful, ethical or values-based an author is. By developing arguments that emphasise the value of relationships, morality, truth, or duty of care towards others, writers highlight their good character, and thus readers are more inclined to side with them.

Much research has focused on the important role emotions play in persuasion (Dillard, 1998). For example, the work of Brader (2006) investigated the use of appeals in political advertisements, finding they were deeply saturated with emotional appeals, and that the persuasive effectiveness of campaign advertising generally depended on whether appeals were made to threaten or enthrall audiences. Some forms of rhetoric practiced today are regarded with suspicion and disdain, including propaganda, demagoguery, brainwashing and doublespeak (Corbett & Connors, 1999). While appeals to pathos are a powerful tool of persuasion, young writers who focus too much attention on appealing to pathos, risk their credibility, and can thus undermine any appeals to ethos.

Finally, Aristotle (Lawson-Tancred, 2004) described appeals to logos as “proofs achieved by the speech when we demonstrate either a real or an apparent persuasive aspect of each particular matter” (p. 75). In contemporary times, the NAPLAN Persuasive Writing Marking Guide (ACARA, 2013) highlighted a number of language choices that signify appeals to logos (See Fig. 1), however the classical model was more concerned with making use of either inductive reasoning – “moving from particulars to generalization”, or deductive reasoning – “beginning with principles that the writer and readers share, and drawing from them inferences that apply to the issue at hand” (Nelson & Kinneavy, 2003, p. 792).

In any given act of persuasion, an author can employ the use of one appeal exclusively, or some combination of two or three appeals. The choice is “partly determined by the nature of the thesis being argued, partly by the circumstances, and partly (perhaps mainly) by the kind of audience being addressed” (Corbett and Connors, 1999, p. 32). All three appeals are associated with successful persuasion, with some speakers and writers making them “haphazardly, others by custom and out of habit”, and thanks to the classical model, “it is possible to study

the reason for success both of those who succeed by habituation and of those who do so by chance” (Aristotle, trans. Lawson-Tancred, 2004, p. 66).

Figure 1: Features of arguments that draw on the three appeals according to the NAPLAN persuasive writing marking guide (NAPLAN, 2011)

Ethos – appeal to values	Logos – appeal to reason	Pathos – appeal to emotion
Value of relationships	Dispassionate language	Emphatic statements
Appeal to truth	Objective author stance	Emotive language
Duty of care	Citing of a relevant authority	Direct appeal to the reader
Creation of a just society	Objective view of opposition	Appeal to spurious authority
Community responsibility	Qualified measured statements	Disparagement of opposition

To summarise the discovery of argument process, the form of persuasive discourse a speaker or writer chooses will indicate a set of special topics that they can base their arguments on. In turn, these topics suggest material from which proofs can be made, in order to persuade others to think or do something. According to Phillips (1991), the canons of classical rhetoric have “stood the test of time” and “represent a legitimate taxonomy of processes” (p. 70). Teachers can do a great deal to provide students with access to a range of persuasive genres and to provoke discussion around the power of a particular persuasive genre (e.g. a campaigning advertisement, an iconic political speech, a petition or letter) to convey a message. Immersing students in the processes of discovering and arranging arguments can also prompt greater familiarity with the kinds of rhetorical possibilities inherent in persuasive writing – “if one is going to write in a genre, it is very helpful to have read in that genre first” (National Council of Teachers of English, 2004).

4 Persuasive writing in literacy testing contexts

We have been fortunate to secure access to sixty of the highest performing Tasmanian students’ responses to the 2011 NAPLAN persuasive writing test. In the next section of the paper, we exemplify and analyse features of Year 9 students’ writing in relation to the prompt ‘Too much money is spent on toys and games’ and identify the sophistication of varying expressions of argument. The linkage to a pre-requisite of high quality civics and citizenship education becomes quickly apparent.

While other methods of writing instruction focus on how persuasive texts are structured in generic stages, the principles of Invention assist authors to construct arguments based on special topics that are associated with the three forms of persuasive discourse. With their ideas invented, authors can then express them via appeals to ethos, logos and/or pathos to suit a given audience. At any stage in the process, the author can



refer back to the principles of Invention should they become unsure of what or how to argue.

While these high performing students may not have been explicitly taught the principles of Invention, their use in the texts was evident. For instance, one student opened up her exposition with the following arguments:

“There is no doubt in my mind that far too much money is spent on toys and games. In a world where natural disasters are on the rise and more and more people are living in abject poverty, there is every reason to spend money on global issues, rather than luxuries. In a world where obesity is on the rise, encouraging hours of immobilization is not an option. And in a world that is slowly being taken over by smog and trash, we cannot afford the mass production of these objects”.

The language choices made by this student sustain a juxtaposition of global poverty and consumer spending, and articulate and exemplify themes of unhealthiness and unsustainability. Yet classical rhetoric allows us to probe more deeply into the language choices made to offer these arguments. In terms of persuasive discourse, this excerpt is largely deliberative in nature. Three of the four sentences focus on what people should or should not do in the future to combat global issues. The author drew mainly on the special topics of the worthy and the unworthy, painting a picture of what is wrong with the world, and what are—ethically speaking—the ‘right’ ways to respond to such problems. Regarding appeals, the majority were made to logos and ethos. The author consistently began sentences with descriptions of significant issues affecting people and the planet, and followed these up with suggested courses of action. Appeals to ethos could have been strengthened if the author drew on views of experts in these fields, for example, how they have argued that natural disasters are on the rise that more people are living in abject poverty, that obesity is on the rise, and that smog and trash is taking over the world. These issues were stated as unarguable truths without dialogic space for alternative realities. However, given the nature of NAPLAN testing—which does not allow students to access books or computers once the test is underway - it is unsurprising that such arguments are typically based on opinion rather than evidence. In more authentic civics and citizenship persuasive writing contexts, teachers can underline the benefits of drawing on the views of experts and using evidence from research to support truth claims.

Another high-performing Year 9 student also developed the theme of distorted spending priorities as their central argument:

“Technological game consoles are resource-intensive to produce and are highly expensive for anyone buying them, so why do we keep putting our money into useless things like this when we could be helping find

cures for diseases, stop the famine in Africa, and give the homeless a place to live? It is absolutely certain that we are wasting too much money on technological and digital games. Although they may be fun and entertaining, why not spend the money on something useful?”

This excerpt is also largely deliberative in nature, as the student juxtaposed contrasting ideas in order to persuade those who spend money on games to consider changing their behaviour. As in the first example, this second student drew on the special topics of deliberative discourse to present certain behaviours as worthy (finding cures for diseases, stopping famine, and giving homeless people somewhere to live), and others as unworthy (producing and buying technological game consoles). Yet unlike the first example, this student drew on notions of the advantageous to suggest that playing games is entertaining, and also of the disadvantageous to suggest that games are expensive to purchase. The student juxtaposed the special topics of deliberative discourse, arguing that while toys are fun and entertaining (advantageous), money should be spent on things that are more useful (worthy). Ranking special topics as more or less important is an effective way for students to show consideration of a range of perspectives, and can enhance the persuasiveness of their writing.

Regarding the three appeals, this student could have appealed to pathos as they wrote about diseases, famine and homelessness, however the arguments were kept formal and analytical, never featuring emotive verbs like ‘suffer’, ‘starve’ or ‘freeze’. Instead, the student relied on appealing to logos and ethos, highlighting why it is disadvantageous and therefore illogical to produce and buy technological games, and strongly promoted ethically sound actions that make the world a better place for those in need.

While appealing to the emotions of the audience can persuade others (Corbett & Connors, 1999), assessors valued this student’s choice to not use such appeals in this way. By contrast, another student pursued a comparable theme to equally powerful effect, yet with a thicker layering of appeals to pathos:

“While some children in the developed world are having fun with toys and games, millions live in poverty without even a teddy bear to hug at night...As you are reading this piece of writing four children have died due to malnutrition in a third world country. When you think about how many have died in the duration of this essay, then the toys you played with in your childhood don’t matter at all. The billions of dollars spent on toys each year to keep a small number of children amused for a couple of hours could really be put to a better use”.

At one level, this kind of writing can be admired and assessed for the sophistication of its sentence structure, vocabulary, cohesion and its accumulation of figurative



devices such as antithesis, parallelism and hyperbole, but what should not be discounted is its passionate realisation of principles of Invention. The first three sentences focused on comparing the lives of the many children living in poverty with those of the fewer children living in developed countries. The text drew on the special topics of epideictic discourse, in particular personal assets to highlight those who are more and less fortunate, but also, more implicitly, virtues and vices to portray those in developed countries as potentially unkind, selfish and even cruel. The author also made emotive appeals to pathos, describing the many children in less fortunate countries as “not even having a teddy bear to hug at night” (i.e. possessing a complete lack of comfort) and “dying of malnutrition” (i.e. possessing a complete lack of food). By consistently referring to the greater number of children living in less fortunate countries, this served to increase the guilt felt by those from more privileged backgrounds. While these sorts of emotive language choices may not be appropriate in certain academic writing contexts, they can have a strong impact in civics and citizenship contexts as they often leverage core tenets of values and beliefs for rhetorical purposes, and can therefore be highly persuasive.

High performing students drew on the principles of Invention in a variety of ways to address this task. In contrast to those who based arguments on the worthy or unworthy, another student focused on the deliberative topic of the advantageous, arguing that “the money we waste on toys and games could be used for our children’s educational benefit”. Aside from educational benefits, the student also argued that limiting children’s access to toys could be advantageous to their health and well-being. The pay off line concluded:

“Would you rather support your child’s future or their endless need for toys that they hardly use? (...) The next time you go to buy your child toys and games, think again. It will save you money, help your child’s future, and benefit their health”.

The targeting of a parental audience helped this student focus their message. In terms of appeals, they emphasised logos, providing multiple reasons why it was illogical to purchase toys and games from children when they cause numerous issues and hinder the development of important life skills.

Another discursive response managed to turn the question into a meditation on the human condition and was prepared to mount a modest case in favour of toys and games:

“Humans only way of survival and fulfilment in life is to achieve a good balance of work, play, and rest (...) An appropriate amount of pleasure things should be

provided for child and adult alike. When considering what to buy, one should bear in mind that toys and games should be constructed out of sustainable and hardy materials such as wood or metal so they can last, and be effective over a lengthy period of time. In this way we can limit the money we spend on toys and games and direct it to something more important and worthwhile”.

In this deliberative text, the student based arguments in favour of buying particular, sustainably constructed toys and games on the special topic of the advantageous (as they provide pleasure for children and adults), while simultaneously basing arguments against the purchase of too many toys on the topic of the unworthy (as such actions are not important or worthwhile). As with a number of other high scoring examples, this text predominantly featured appeals to logos and ethos, with logical reasons provided for both sides of the topic, and a strong focus on ethics, with the suggested course of action arguably leading to the sustained health of people and the planet.

The high quality writing shared here has a powerful values base. It draws upon an internalised and synthesised sense of understanding about global issues, environmental sustainability, and governmental and consumer spending priorities. There is some higher order moral reasoning (Rowe, 2005). The students have moved from simple statements or opinions and consequential reasoning towards emergent ideological thinking (Connell, 1971). Analysis of high grade essays reveals that achievement is measured in terms of students demonstrating the capacity to move between concrete cases and abstract ideas and communicate meanings drawn from broad knowledge contexts. Students are “able to leap up further” from the concrete base established by the literacy test question setters “to reach more abstract principles” (Maton, 2009, p. 54). The frame of vision shifts from individual needs and wants to consideration of the collective common good. Students are able to think beyond the personal and concrete to the socio-political, public and global realms. The students have also moved from affective, common-sense empathy to cognitive empathy and explicit argumentation. This kind of writing does not come out of nowhere. Students need multiple opportunities in and beyond humanities and social sciences classrooms to rehearse and debate their responses to a wide range of contemporary social and political issues. As McCutchen (1986) demonstrated, children’s knowledge of the topic at hand greatly impacts the quality of their writing. The high performing texts also prompt the question, ‘How can teachers help more of their students to argue with this degree of written sophistication?’



5 From theory to practice: scaffolding written persuasive advocacy

Schools which are undertaking effective, high quality citizenship education enable learning through action—taking citizenship beyond the classroom to achieve tangible changes in the local community or wider national and global contexts (Audsley et al. 2013). The recently drafted Australian Curriculum for Civics and Citizenship has framed a curriculum which aims to support students to:

- “participate in civil society and community life with a focus on social and global issues” and
- “engage in activities to improve society, guided by civic values and attitudes” (ACARA, 2012, p. 10)

Having learned about, engaged with, and researched an issue, students are then encouraged to do something about it. Examples can include a letter to a politician or local leader, communication with the media, the creation of a display, a presentation using Information and Communication Technology, email petitions or other internet/social media engagement, a role-play, or an assembly designed for peers or younger pupils. All of these actions represent conscious acts of advocacy directed at an internal or external audience which aim to engage hearts and minds. And yet, in entering the shared territory between citizenship education and literacy, humanities and social sciences teachers are largely without a road-map. The rich understandings developed by literacy and language specialists around how young people can build their argumentation, communication and writing skills have barely dented classroom practices beyond the discipline context of English.

To support the analysis of the cross-fertilization of literacy principles into authentic civics and citizenship contexts, we share the following model of persuasive letter writing – drawn from a recent representative textbook published in England. Given the layers of complexity to persuasive writing already highlighted, it should be acknowledged that offering text-book guidance in this area is challenging. Connor (1990) noted “the inherent difficulty of operationalising and quantifying the new concepts of persuasion developed by linguists, rhetoricians, and philosophers” (p. 69). We identify the positive and helpful features of this stepped process before going on to suggest some revisions drawn from the principles of classical rhetoric and research in the areas of argumentation and communication.

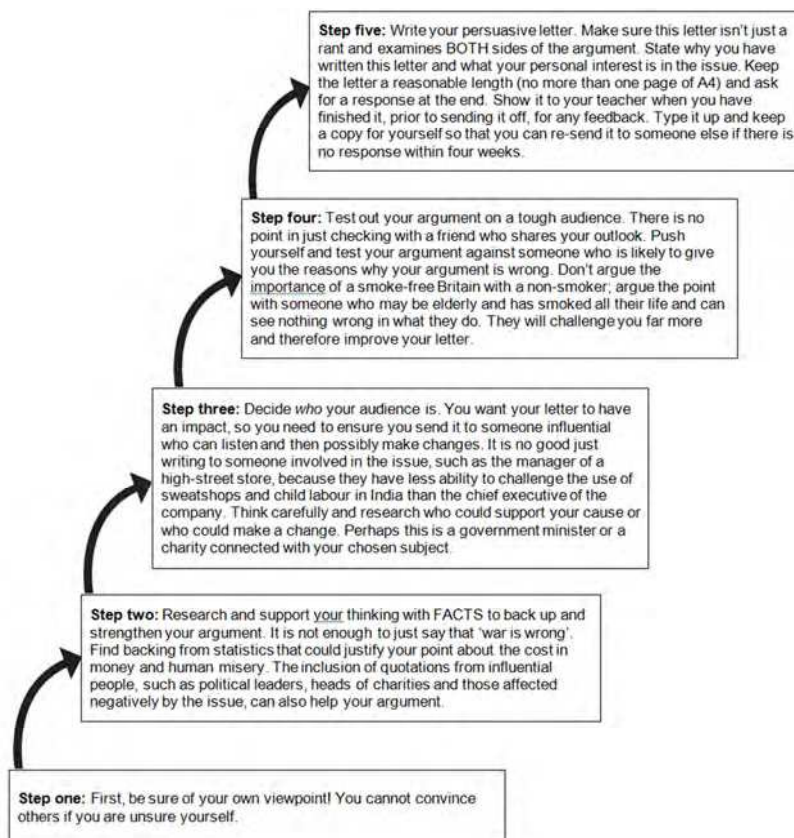


Figure 2: Textbook example of student guidance on writing a persuasive letter in the context of active citizenship (source: Ibegbuna, R. & Pottinger, L. (2009) *Citizenship through Informed and Responsible Action*. Folens: Haddenham, UK p. 57)

There is plenty to admire in the structure of this guidance to students. It represents a relatively developed thinking and writing frame in the context of scaffolding persuasive argument. Step 1 foregrounds and underlines the importance of the discovery of argument, however stops short of recommending how students can achieve this. Having a clear argument framework or super-structure is a fundamental component of successful persuasion. At Step 2 there is strong support for the notion of appealing to ethos and logos to enhance the credibility and reliability of arguments, with students encouraged to justify claims through the deployment of facts, statistics, and/or examples. At Step 3 there is nuanced advice in relation to tailoring argument to a specific audience or individual. Skilled arguers understand that the goal is not simply to advance an argument, but to advance that argument with the cooperation of one’s audience or reader. At Step 4 students are encouraged to actively consider and be prepared to refute the views of others. Students are pushed in the direction of considering the views of different stakeholders and multiple perspectives. Accommodating the perspective of others has been singled out as a critical social-cognitive quality that children must develop as a pre-requisite to effective persuasive argument (Clark & Delia, 1977). It is also



fundamental to effective citizenship education. At Step 5 students are cautioned against producing a ‘rant’. And it is certainly true—as we have indicated earlier—that an over-reliance upon emotional appeals to pathos may undermine a writer’s credibility. Overall, the adolescent audience to whom this guidance is offered receives some sensible advice. Nevertheless, we would argue that the guidance is incomplete. Without some significant elaboration and the incorporation of principles from classical rhetoric into the context of active citizenship.

lbeqbuna & Pottinger’s model), the Issue Stage we propose facilitates the discovery/invention of arguments for and against the issue at stake before a position is taken.

Researching and finding evidence about how the people involved on either side would be impacted by a proposed action or policy is an inherent part of this process, with the emphasis firmly on understanding an issue more fully. By creating graphic organizers and reviewing their responses to the scaffolded questions, students are better able to take a position that is informed by research and real-life stories, that compares and contrasts strengths and weaknesses of different viewpoints, and provides a solid foundation for the construction of compelling arguments. In doing so, students practice self-reflexivity and recognise the values-base from which they establish their own viewpoints. In other words, they are able to not only answer what they think about an issue, but also reflect upon why they feel this way, and what their position is based on.

Before students decide which of their responses might be used as lines of argument in their persuasive text, they must consider the needs of the audience they are attempting to persuade. Step 2 of the revised model has thus been labelled the ‘Audience Stage’. At this point, the student has a ready store of responses to the initial scaffolding questions, yet now must critically assess who they are writing for, and strategically select arguments that are likely to win their favour (Ryder, Vander Lei & Roen, 1999). To achieve this, different scaffolding questions can be posed, with a focus on the target audience. Notice that this Audience Stage is

where the three appeals are considered by the student author. Certain audiences respond effectively to emotional appeals, while others require strong appeals to logic and credibility to be convinced of their positions. The first two stages of our revised model, which can be classified as pre-writing exercises, highlight the choices available to students in how they might attempt to persuade a given audience. These choices are ascertained by employing the principles of classical rhetoric within the scaffolding questions, scrutinising the general issue first, and the specific audience second. Following these pre-writing exercises, the author is well-positioned to start writing their persuasive text.

The advice presented by the textbook (Fig. 2) concludes at Step 5, with the writing of a persuasive text, yet we would argue that this process stops at precisely the point where significant difficulties can arise for many students—the arrangement and articulation of their arguments. Students certainly need to be able to

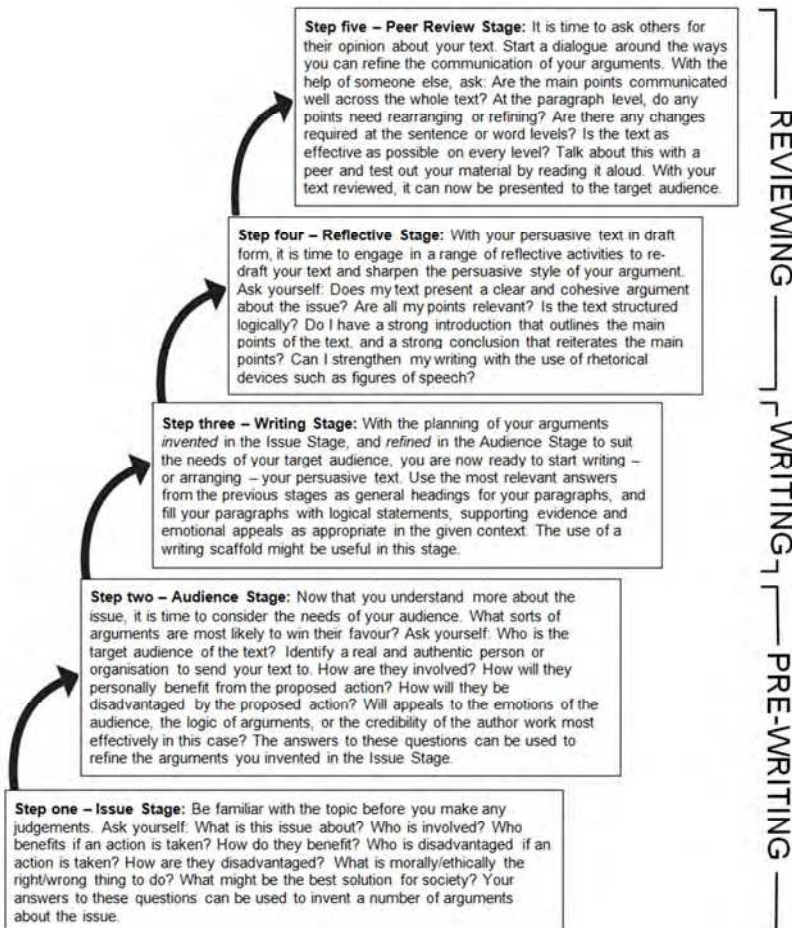


Figure 3 : Revised guidance on writing a persuasive text in the context of active citizenship

Rather than beginning the process by ensuring students are ‘sure of their own viewpoint’, we argue students must first be familiar with the issue at stake before any judgements are made. This initial step, which we refer to as the ‘Issue Stage’, requires an issue to be approached neutrally and considered from a variety of viewpoints. Students can unpack issues by posing scaffolding questions based on the special topics of deliberative discourse. In the majority of active citizenship, controversial and real life contexts, students write about particular actions that they think should or should not happen, and as such, deliberative questions often provide the appropriate means to understand the issue from multiple perspectives (Claire & Holden, 2007). Instead of first taking a position and then finding research to support that position (i.e. Steps 1 and 2 on



consider an issue from multiple perspectives, take a stance, consider the target audience for whom they are writing and be prepared to counter opposing viewpoints, but effective persuasive writing will also benefit from opportunities for students to:

- have seen and analysed comparative models and genres of persuasive writing and had opportunities to see what successful persuasive writing looks and feels like (Rose & Martin, 2012);
- talk about their work with teachers and peers (Wollman-Bonilla, 2004, p. 509-510);
- 'play' with persuasive texts so that they acquire and consolidate the concepts and meta-language to discuss the various argument structures and language features (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011);
- trial different modes of argument and different kinds of appeals;
- adjust the strength and focus of arguments and/or expand and contract arguments in the light of feedback and review by peers and teachers (Hillocks, 1995);
- consider specific strategies to most effectively introduce and conclude arguments;
- work more consciously on the vocabulary and language of advocacy and road-test the effectiveness of particular rhetorical devices and figures of speech deployed throughout their draft texts (Corbett & Connors, 1999);
- refine syntactic structure and vocabulary choices—such as the use of paired words, more sophisticated verbs, parallelism, or alliterative adjectives;
- consider their text at the level of sentence production and coherence. Emphasis, vividness, and 'flow' can all be considered at this 'micro' level of communication (the 3 x 3 and 4x 4 toolkits for persuasive writing are both highly useful at this writing stage (Humphrey et. al., 2010; Humphrey & Robinson, 2013)');
- edit and revise their work before submitting a final polished version with the aim of achieving a real and authentic outcome.

All of these additional layers of activity reflect upon and respect writing as a process. They enable higher order meta-cognition learning opportunities. Constructivist researchers argue that communication development is stronger as a socially shared experience with opportunities to discuss the interpretation and control of language with others. Given the opportunity to reflect on the content, structure and communication of their arguments with peers, young people begin to develop more advanced and generalisable argumentative strategies (Anderson et al., 2001). Effective end of task plenary review and evaluation processes can also promote meta-cognition and the transfer of argumentation strategies to new topics.

High quality persuasive writing should not be a one-shot deal. In a world beyond the artificiality of an examination hall, many steps are usually and ideally required to get from initial thoughts to the final iteration of articulated expression. This reflects authentic real world contexts. When writers actually start writing, they think of things that they did not have in mind before they began writing as they reflect upon their initial ideas. The act of writing is recursive in generating additional ideas, and revised thinking. We would therefore augment the Steps outlined in the student guide (Fig. 2) with the post-writing reflection, refinement and peer review encompassed in Steps 4 and 5 (Fig. 3).

6 Conclusion

Our observed experience is that much persuasive writing happening in Australian schools and classrooms - responding to NAPLAN test imperatives - is artificial and de-contextualized. It also tends to be reflective of a culture which rewards individual responses rather than collective endeavour. This is not reflective of real-world contexts where there are opportunities to bounce ideas off other people, share concerns, and build arguments in a team environment. Where the NAPLAN persuasive writing imperatives seem to have had constraining effects in schools, we propose a structured pedagogy linked to civic agendas and concerns which explores, connects, and stimulates political engagement and empathy. We contend that persuasive writing can be taught in a principled way, with the citizenship curriculum landscape providing authentic public audiences for persuasion, whilst also preparing students for high-stakes literacy tests.

The curriculum links between citizenship education and literacy can be strong. By Year 10, Australian students are expected within the English curriculum to create texts for 'informative or persuasive purposes that reflect upon challenging and complex issues' (ACARA, 2011b). It is also a stated curriculum aim that "In Civics and Citizenship students learn to understand and use language to explore, analyse, discuss and communicate information, concepts and ideas...to a variety of audiences" (ACARA, 2012b, p. 19). Allan Luke called recently for "substantive and intellectually demanding teaching and learning about how to 'read the world'; and rich, scaffolded classroom talk around matters of substance and weight" (Luke, 2012, p. 11). There can be a real power in engaging young people in deliberative democratic practices. Education for civic engagement needs to seek to develop within young people not only participation in democratic structures and debates but also the skills of 'democratic communication' (Englund, 2006, p. 503). This naturally includes the articulation of ideas in writing. It also incorporates helping young citizens wrestle with the characteristics of what constitutes a shared common good in ways in which Aristotle discussed in the *Politics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* (see Peterson, 2011, p. 34-38). Our article is conceived as an attempt to build bridges between



complementary curriculum areas and help students transfer knowledge and skills in relation to persuasive writing across different contexts of acquisition.

We take inspiration from our geographical location. Alongside the literacy challenges, Tasmania is also a place rich in fundamental and contested political debates, especially around environmental issues, where there are a range of opportunities for young people to exercise their democratic views (See Comber, Nixon & Reid, 2007). Topic areas include: the future of the forestry industry; the protection of native, old-growth trees; the possible heritage status of the Tarkine area in the north west of the State; the rights of four wheel drivers and surfers set against the protection of indigenous sites in the sand dunes on the State's west coast; and the pros and cons of the construction of wind farms on King Island. These are all issues on which young people can have an opinion and a voice. As Kerkham and Comber (2013) note, "Putting the environment at the centre of the literacy curriculum inevitably draws teachers into the politics of place and raises questions concerning what is worth preserving and what should be transformed" (p.197). Sometimes the learning point for students will be about the need to balance competing and conflicting demands, and understanding that in a democracy not everyone gets what they want.

Skilled argumentation and persuasion involves two related sets of cognitive skills—argument invention and communication, language and discourse strategies. Ultimately, the degree to which young people have succeeded in integrating and applying these complex skill sets is likely to determine the quality of their persuasive writing. This article has focused predominantly on the first dimension - the pre-writing generation of ideas. How to 'discover' something to say on a given subject is the crucial problem for most students. Since 'Inventio' is a systematized way of generating and critically reviewing ideas and alternative perspectives, we have argued that teachers and students may find immersion in this classical rhetorical approach helpful. In reviewing a scaffolded citizenship education writing frame we have also provided some more tentative suggestions in relation to a stepped approach towards the arrangement and style of argument, and hope to trial this framework in Tasmanian schools. A fuller exploration of engaging and effective pedagogies around 'Dispositio' and 'Elocutio' in the context of teaching civics and citizenship education is likely to be a fruitful area of future research.

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Endnote

¹ For good accounts of citizenship education in Australia see Print, 2008 and Tudball & Gordon, 2014



Jane McDonnell

Finding a Place in the Discourse: Film, Literature and the Process of Becoming Politically Subject

This paper reports on the role of the narrative arts in young people's political subjectivity and democratic learning. Drawing on theoretical insights into the process of subjectification and the relationship between politics and aesthetics, the paper discusses a number of findings from an empirical research project carried out with young people in two arts contexts. Interpreting these in the light of a theoretical framework that privileges a performative understanding of subjectivity, the paper argues that narrative art forms such as literature, film and television play an important role in the ways young people construct and perform their political subjectivity, and that this is an important part of their overall democratic learning. The implications of this for democratic education are discussed and the paper concludes with the suggestion that we need to rethink political literacy, civic engagement and democratic learning in aesthetic and imaginative terms.

Keywords:

political subjectivity, arts, democracy, democratic education, political literacy, civic engagement

1 Introduction

The process of subjectification, the means by which people become who they are, has received considerable attention in the educational literature over the past two decades. Important work in the sociology of education has troubled stable notions of identity to focus instead on the performances that people engage in as they take up particular subject positions. Often based on theorisations of gender and sexual identity, such research has drawn attention to the myriad performances that young people engage in via the various discursive resources available to them in their everyday lives. Crucial to such discussions is the view that identity is not so much acquired or given, but performed or enacted, and that young people assume different subject positions in different circumstances as part of a fluid and ongoing process of performing their own identity. Such theories represent an important moment within both sociology and education. In freeing up understandings of the person from fixed categories of identity, they also highlight the educative potential of the process of subjectification itself.

This paper makes a specific contribution to these discussions by illustrating the role of the narrative arts in young people's performances of *political* subjectivity in particular, and in turn their democratic learning. It charts how art forms such as fiction and film contribute to the

ways in which young people learn to take up subject positions as democratic citizens and members of society, and engage in democratic learning. In order to do so, the paper engages with theoretical work on the nature of democratic learning (Biesta 2006; 2010), the relationship between politics and aesthetics (Mouffe, 2007; Rancière, 2004; 2007) and the role of the arts in the relationship between democracy and education (McDonnell, 2014). Based on empirical research carried out with young people between 2006 and 2008, the paper demonstrates how narrative art forms including film, television, and literature played an important role in these young people's performances political subjectivity and, in turn, their democratic learning. In doing so, it offers insights into the ways in which democratic education might best address the actual experiences of young people in relation to politics, democracy and citizenship. The paper argues that we cannot think about young people's political literacy and civic engagement without also thinking of them as imaginative, creative and cultural beings whose political subjectivity and democratic learning is played out within a world of discourse and narrative that is both enabling and constraining.

2 Subjectivity, identity and education

The performative understandings of subjectivity outlined above have often been taken up within the sociology of education to illuminate the kinds of identity work that goes on in schools and other educational settings. Examples include the work of Youdell (2006a) and Hey (2006), both of whom have drawn on Judith Butler's theorisations of gender and sexuality to explore the ways in which young people perform their identities by taking up subject positions from amongst the range of social and cultural resources available to them. Youdell's (2006a) work for example has illustrated how various ethnic subject positions were taken up in at a 'multi-cultural' day at an Australian high school, as young

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people variously performed their identities as ‘Turkish’, ‘Aussie’, ‘Lebanese’ and ‘Arab’. In doing so, she illustrates the performative nature of identity within an educational context. Hey (2006) meanwhile has illustrated how the use of language in schools played into particular performances of identity amongst girls, picking up on how ‘the performative language of gender and class found in the girls’ vernacular, terms such as “boffin”, “hippies” and “slags” formed part of, ‘the much wider, contested distribution of cultural and thus material resources’ (2006, p. 513).

Crucial to these views of identity construction as an ongoing set of performances is the concept of subjectification, as a process in which people become who they are through engagement with discursive and cultural norms. Hey’s (2006) work in this area is particularly interesting because she argues for an educational dimension to the process of subjectification itself. In her words, young people ‘learn to identify with places in discourse’ (2006, p. 446) as they continually enact and re-enact their identity. Building on Hey’s (2006) work, it is possible to go beyond the use of performative theory to interpret performances of identity within educational contexts, to see the process of subjectification as an educational site in itself. The research reported in this paper aimed to explore this via a focus on young people’s performances in relation to their identity as citizens and political beings, and to understand the relevance of these for their democratic learning.

3 Political subjectivity and democratic learning

The work outlined above was helpful for the research, highlighting how a person’s identity and subjectivity can be thought of in performative terms, as something which is enacted differently in varying circumstances. It also highlights the educational potential of this view, demonstrating that the ways in which people take up particular positions over time is also a learning process. In order to theorise the young people’s political subjectivity in particular, and their democratic learning, the work of Biesta (2006; 2010) was employed in the research. In his (2010) reading of Arendt he argues against an individualistic and psychological understanding of the democratic person, towards a more collective and performative understanding of democratic subjectivity. What is particularly interesting about this argument is that he shows very clearly how it is possible to see political and democratic subjectivity as a quality of interaction, rather than an attribute that individuals possess, echoing the performative theory that has been influential in recent conceptualisations of identity.

Building on Arendt’s concepts of action and political existence in the public sphere, he stresses the important conditions of plurality and unpredictability in making such existence possible. For Biesta, political existence is the space in which democratic subjectivity can occur as people have the freedom to ‘bring new beginnings into the world’ (Biesta 2010, p. 559) and respond to the beginnings of others in order to create something new.

This has important implications for democratic learning and democratic education. Rather than seeing the task of democratic education as one of preparing young people for political existence and democratic engagement, Biesta (2010) turns the argument around, insisting that political existence and democratic subjectivity are the start point for democratic learning, not its outcomes. On this view, democratic education is principally concerned with supporting people to learn from the experience of political existence and democratic subjectivity, as well as with providing opportunities for people to experience these (Biesta, 2010, p. 571).

Elsewhere (2006) Biesta has set this view in historical context. Charting theories of the relationship between education and democracy from Kant through to Dewey and beyond, Biesta notes that this relationship has most often been conceptualized as one in which education acts as the handmaiden or catalyst of democracy. Since the Enlightenment, education has been seen as the primary means of promoting democracy and ensuring that citizens can make well informed decisions in the exercise of their democratic rights. On this view, education is something that exists *for* democracy. Dewey’s philosophy has, in contrast, framed democracy as a means through which children and young people could be best educated. Here the emphasis has been on education *through* democracy, and the cultivation of democratic practice within educational settings. Both of these views can be seen in approaches to democratic education in the UK. The view of education-for-democracy has animated mass political education programmes in mainstream schools, such as citizenship education, which seeks to instill the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary for active citizenship (Crick, 1998). Meanwhile the view of education-through-democracy has found form in the philosophy of A.S. Niell and the tradition of democratic schooling, and more latterly in the area of student voice (Fielding, 2004; Rudduck, Fielding 2004).

Biesta’s (2006) work is helpful for understanding the landscape of democratic and political education in the UK but it is also useful for thinking through innovative and alternative approaches. He argues that both the above traditions have focused too much on producing democratic citizens rather than on exploring the actual qualities of citizenship, democracy and political experience for young people today. Elsewhere, he has argued that citizenship education in schools (which was introduced as a statutory subject for secondary schools in England and Wales in 2002 following the Crick report and which was explicitly designed to address the ‘problem’ of young people’s political ignorance and apathy) have focused too much on teaching young people the right kinds of knowledge, attitudes and skills to be good citizens. Drawing on important insights and principles from critical pedagogy, he has argued instead for an emphasis on young people’s actual experiences of citizenship and democracy in everyday life, and what they learn from these. These ideas have been expressed



in Biesta and Lawy's concepts of 'citizenship-as-practice' (Lawy, Biesta 2006) and 'democratic learning' (Biesta, Lawy 2006) and have been illustrated in empirical research into young people's experiences (Biesta et al., 2009).

This research worked with a similar understanding by focusing on the actual conditions of young people's political, democratic and civic engagement to understand their democratic learning. In particular, it sought to explore how the arts might play a role in this learning, as a significant and distinct element of young people's experiences in the world.

4 Political subjectivity, democratic learning and the narrative arts

In order to explore the role of the arts within young people's democratic learning, the research focused in particular on the relationship between the arts and young people's political subjectivity. The research worked with the understanding that the arts are not periphery to such subjectivity, but are in fact central to it. Elsewhere (McDonnell, 2014) I have argued that the work of Rancière (2004; 2007) and Mouffe (2007) are particularly helpful in conceptualising this, as their theories imply a very close relationship between the political and the aesthetic. Mouffe (2007) frames this in terms of hegemony, highlighting the role of art and culture in creating and maintaining capitalist power relations. She therefore sees the use of artistic strategies within political activism as important for their ability to disrupt the symbolic and cultural frameworks that support the dominant, capitalist order (Mouffe, 2007, p. 5).

Practical examples of this can be seen in the aesthetic strategies of political activist groups and new social movements. The musical interventions of Pussy Riot and the adoption of Guy Fawkes masks, taken from the film 'V for Vendetta', by members of the Occupy movement offer just two examples from contemporary political activism. Barnard (2011) has argued that the tactics of the 'freegan' movement in New York (such as 'dumpster diving' in combination with public speeches condemning mass consumption) represent acts of political street theatre designed to draw attention to the damaging excesses of capitalism (2011, p. 421-422).

Rancière's view of the relationship between politics and aesthetics is more complex. Rather than viewing the arts as a useful strategy within political activism, he sees political and democratic subjectivity as aesthetic processes in and of themselves. This can be seen in his view of democracy as a fluid movement that is embodied in specific political acts, which disrupt the status quo. He argues that democracy is, 'only ever entrusted to the constancy of its specific acts' which are, 'singular and precarious' (2006, p. 74) and which shift the grounds of politics. The civil rights movement in the United States of America is illustrative of this, and Rancière refers to the actions of Rosa Parks, and the ensuing boycott following her refusal to give up a seat on a bus, to illustrate the point about how democracy occurs through a process of

political subjectification. He argues that in taking the action, Parks and the boycotters really acted politically and became politically subject, thus changing the political landscape and creating a new, supplementary kind of political subject (2006, p. 61).

Interestingly, he uses the metaphor of theatre to describe such political action, arguing that this political subjectification involves a process of 'staging' (2006, p.59) the contradictions and dualities that exist within a given political order; in this case between the equality enshrined in United States constitution and the inequality found in the state laws of Alabama at the time. By using this theatrical metaphor, he emphasises the aesthetic dimensions of political subjectification as something which forces us to see and experience political reality anew by 'bringing into play' (2006, p. 62) old tensions and taken-for-granted contradictions. This view is most clearly expressed in his concept of the 'distribution of the sensible' (2004, p. 12) and his claim that 'politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time' (2004, p. 13).

For Rancière then, political subjectivity is itself aesthetic. But he also goes further, to argue that the arts can play an important role in preparing the groundwork for democracy by opening up 'channels for political subjectivisation' (Rancière, 2004, p. 40) that are disruptive and dis-unifying. Via quite a specific history of art and aesthetics, he argues that both art and politics today create 'fictions' which allow certain ways of being, seeing and doing. What is most interesting, in terms of democracy, are those instances in which the arts (and literature in particular) perform a disruptive rather than a unifying function. Rancière describes this as 'literary disincorporation' from imaginary communities (2004, p. 40) and refers to nineteenth century literature such as Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* as examples of how fiction contributes to such reconfigurations by employing a particular kind of equality of the written word. By adopting a linguistic approach that prioritises depiction rather than storytelling, Rancière argues, (the literary equivalent of impressionism), Flaubert's prose breaks down the hierarchies of artistic representation and mirrors the political equality contained in the story of Emma Bovary herself, as well as in its free circulation amongst the general population (2004, p. 55-56).

Whilst quite opaque and esoteric in some ways, Rancière's work highlights the importance of literature and fiction in opening up new ways of being, seeing and engaging with the world that also have a political significance. This has important implications for education. The political dimensions of literature have long been of interest to educationalists. Research into the stereotyping of gender roles and sexuality in children's literature (see for example Youdell, 2006b) are emblematic of this, as is Giroux's (2011) critical theory of film as a kind of 'public pedagogy' that sustains and occasionally subverts capitalist power relations. These

interpretations tend to focus on the ways in which narrative constrains political possibilities, however. Rancière's work is more optimistic, illustrating how particular narrative tropes and artistic techniques open up new political possibilities that have more to do with democracy and equality.

5 The research

The research aimed to explore the relationship between young people's democratic learning and their engagement with the arts; both in terms of their participation in arts contexts and in more diffuse forms of engagement such as reading novels, listening to music, watching television and going to the cinema. Democratic engagement was seen as an important platform for the young people's performances of democratic subjectivity and their democratic learning, and was conceptualized broadly as something that can occur both at the micro level of everyday interactions with others, and at the macro level of political and civic participation in wider society. Findings relating to democratic learning in the specific arts contexts, and to the aesthetic dimensions of a boycott that some of the young people in the study took part in, have been reported elsewhere (see Biesta et al., 2010; McDonnell, 2014, respectively). This paper, however, focuses on the more diffuse ways in which the young people engaged with the arts (particularly film, television and creative writing) and the role this played within their performances of political subjectivity and democratic learning.

The research took the form of a longitudinal study between 2006 and 2008 and was carried out with a cohort of eight young people drawn from two settings; a gallery education project in South West England and a performing arts course at a further education college in the North East. Five young people from the gallery project took part in the research, all aged between fourteen and fifteen at the start of the study. Three young people from the performing arts course took part, aged between eighteen and twenty four at the start of the research. Although some of the data relate to contemporary issues and politics at the time of the research, the findings relate to the dynamics involved in the processes of democratic learning and arts engagement, and continue to be relevant. Whilst the details of the young people's engagement are of its time, the principles and processes have more lasting validity.

6 Methodology

The research was carried out as an interpretative study, employing an adapted version of grounded theory based on the work of Charmaz (2006). Whilst building on Strauss and Corbin's classical model, and in particular on their inductive approach to analysis, Charmaz' adaptation avoids the positivism found in their work by emphasizing the emergence of findings through a gradual process of building meaning (Hodkinson, 2008). In particular it involved the construction, rather than the discovery of findings, employing strategies such as

sharing emerging themes and categories with participants, and the redevelopment of these in the light of participants' views, as part of the interpretative process. The research progressed in spiraling rounds of data collection and analysis, each informing the other. Categories were constructed through increasingly more analytic phases of coding, making use of the constant comparative method and of memo-writing to gradually construct more analytic codes and categories. Broad areas of interest, including experiences of political and arts participation, were initially used to guide the data collection process. However, themes and categories emerged from the data as the research progressed.

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interview, with participant observation also carried out in the context of the gallery project. Individual interviews were carried out with each of the participants at least three times over the course of the research. Interviews allowed for an in-depth exploration of the young people's experiences, interpretations and feelings, with the aim of achieving a holistic representation of the people, settings and meanings involved in the research (Cohen, Manion 1994, p. 272; Denzin, Lincoln, 2000, p. 8). They also allowed the possibility of responding flexibly to the participants' articulations within the research setting. Initial interviews were carried out as quite open conversations exploring a range of interests and experiences. As the research progressed, these took on a more structured nature, focusing on emerging categories from the data analysis. Questions were asked to follow up on themes emerging both within the interviews and from previous rounds of data analysis. Five core categories were gradually constructed through this iterative process, and the analysed data were then interpreted in light of the theoretical framework for the research to arrive at some 'substantive theory' (Charmaz 2006, p. 55) about the processes involved in the young people's experiences and learning.

An acknowledgement of the relational quality of the interview setting (Holstein, Gubrium 1995; Byrne, 2004) meant that the interview data were treated not as uncomplicated reports of an underlying reality but as important constructions in an ongoing interpretative process. The findings presented here therefore offer one possible interpretation of the young people's experiences and learning. Additionally, given the theoretical influences informing the research, the interview data were treated as sites in which performances of subjectivity might also occur. Here, the research drew on performative and post-structuralist theory to analyse the use of language within the research process. Youdell (2006), for example, has argued for a recognition of the 'discursive agency' of participants in ethnographic research and attention to 'the moments in which subjects are constituted and constituted subjects act' (2006, p. 513) whilst Butler has noted the importance of 'errancy' in what young people say in the research setting as they recite existing discourses and subject positions (2006, p. 533). Schostak has advocated paying



attention to the 'repunctuating' of routinised language that occurs in the interview setting (2002, p. 210). Where appropriate therefore, data analysis involved paying close attention to the participants' use of language.

The aims of the research were explained in detail to the participants in advance of the research, and participation was voluntary. All participants were informed and reminded of their right to withdraw from the research at any time. It was also made clear that their choice whether or not to participate in the study would not have a detrimental impact on their studies. Participants were informed of how the data would be used and disseminated. Data were stored safely and efforts were taken to ensure confidentiality, including carrying out interviews in private spaces where possible, and not sharing the data in with anyone in its raw form. In the findings presented below, the data have been anonymized using pseudonyms.

7 Findings

The data analysis resulted in the emergence of five categories; decision-making, participation, creativity, identity and change. These were then interpreted in light of the theoretical framework to arrive at findings relating to the young people's democratic and political engagement, their democratic learning, and the role of the arts within these. Findings relating to each of these areas are presented below, to illustrate the ways in which the narrative arts were implicated in the young people's performances of political subjectivity and their democratic learning.

7.1 Democratic, civic and political engagement

One of the main findings of the research was that the arts contexts under study offered the young people opportunities for democratic engagement at the micro level, through their interaction with others. This was a common feature of both the performing arts course and the gallery project, as the following comments from Leanne and Tommy, respectively, show:

'at the end we always make sure the last decision is as a group so there's no one like saying, "oh well I don't want this da da da da da." Everyone's got their own opinion whether they like the idea or they don't and then we sit and think together and think of the right, like a good solution.' (Leanne)

'We all sort of put in equal ideas and stuff and basically it came to like a good project and yeah...we all like took them into consideration definitely and no one was like left out if you know what I mean.' (Tommy)

Interpreted in the light of Biesta's (2010) reading of Arendt, these instances can be seen as examples of political existence and democratic subjectivity, as the young people's collective interactions led to the emergence of something new. However, the findings also demonstrated that this was a difficult process for many

of the young people. One of the important elements of Biesta's (2010) argument about the nature of political existence and democratic subjectivity, is that it is dependent on particular conditions; including plurality, unpredictability and freedom. Often the young people had to overcome existing attitudes to these; particularly a distrust of unpredictability and the tendency to adopt more imposing or passive stances in their approaches to collective decision making, as the following data in relation to the gallery project illustrate:

'everybody did make a contribution it's just her like being the leader...she's just sort of the person who likes to speak in front of people and stuff.' (Tommy)

'we often had those silent moments...when we were like, "erm, yeah, really don't know what to do.'" (Claire)

The research also highlighted the young people's political and civic engagement at the macro level. An important finding here was that many of the young people felt more comfortable with civic engagement through volunteering and charity work than they did with more explicitly political action, and expressed a disaffection with mainstream politics despite their interest in political issues. Daniel's experiences exemplified this:

'I'm so excited about Obama...I'm happy he's going to be the first black president, I think it will like change the world.' (Daniel)

'No, I refuse to vote because it's...I would vote if the lib dems had a chance in the running but I don't think they ever will so I'm not going to vote because I think it's pointless, I mean my one vote's not going to help anything.' (Daniel)

Despite talking about politics with family members, having a deep-seated concern for equality and justice, and taking an interest in global issues, Daniel's actual participation took the form of charity and volunteering:

'I like to do as much as possible. I was a steward for the great north run. I've been talking to my friends and my girlfriend and we're going to walk from the top of Scotland to Hastings for charity next year.' (Daniel)

He also advocated charity rather than political action as a way of tackling the global issues that he was so concerned about:

'all the people that are starving in Africa and stuff, I just think that if we don't get something done about it, it's just going to ruin the human race and like all this global warming I think it's just going to get worse and worse if we don't like put charity in...put money into charity to get research and stuff and try to change it.' (Daniel)



Participation for the young people in the study tended to involve these kinds of civic engagement rather than explicitly political action. There were some exceptions to this, most notably in a boycott organized by the young people in the South West in response price rises in their school canteen, which I have reported on elsewhere (McDonnell, 2014). One or two participants also expressed an interest in local politics. On balance, however, civic forms of participation were more common.

7.2 Democratic learning

One of the most prominent findings in relation to the young people's democratic learning was the growing acceptance and comfort with inclusive, democratic ways of working exhibited by the young people in the gallery project. Whilst many felt uncomfortable with the responsibility for making collective decisions at first, they became more confident with this over time and found ways of achieving a balance between the competing interests in the group. This also appeared to have a lasting impact on their attitudes and behavior, as Jacob's comments below indicate:

'well I think it just sort of helped us to take into account that we can't just think about our own ideas, you have to think about other people's ideas and how they think things should fit together.' (Jacob)

The young people from both settings also demonstrated more confidence in contributing to collective discussions and taking on active roles in public, as they moved through different educational contexts and felt more ability to speak up for themselves. Claire's comments in relation to the gallery project offer an example of this:

'I think it's given me more confidence probably and the way that you can just give your ideas and things, no matter what people think and just get your word out there and your ideas and how if, how you can just take control of a situation if you can see it's not going anywhere, rather than just kind of think, "oh, no-one else is saying anything, we'll just like go and...if you know what I mean?" (Claire)

Dean articulated a similar process, citing the freedom enjoyed on the performing arts course as an important factor in allowing him to come forward and be himself:

'I thought well if I give my ideas it might not be right but since I've come to college and started to be my own person and had the space to do that and be an individual, I thought well, "why not?"' (Dean)

Interpreted in the light of Biesta's (2010) reading of Arendt, these experiences can be seen as part of the young people's performances of political subjectivity, including their ability and willingness to become subject by taking action in the public sphere. Claire's reflections

can be seen to demonstrate learning *from* the experience of political existence and democratic subjectivity in the form of an increased willingness to participate and create more of these opportunities in the future. Dean's experience also illustrates the educational dimensions of subjectification itself, as highlighted by Hey (2006). The experience of becoming his 'own person' can be seen as an important performance of subjectivity, and one which was an educational experiences in itself for Dean, also leading to new sorts of behavior in his interactions with people in the future.

This was not a universal experience, however. For some, being exposed to more opportunities for collective decision making served to reinforce existing behaviour:

'I just maybe realized that I'm not really the person who'll speak up most in front of everyone and I just sort of sit there and take it all in and make a contribution if I want to.' (Tommy)

This is not to say that such experiences were not important within the young people's democratic learning. Tommy learned something different, but no less important than Claire and Dean, as a result of encountering opportunities for political existence in the public sphere.

7.3 The narrative arts and democratic learning

An important finding in relation to how the narrative arts were implicated in the young people's democratic learning was that an engagement with these sometimes fed into their performances of subjectivity in ways that had an impact on their experiences of democratic and political engagement at the micro and macro levels. One example of this was Daniel's engagement with comedy and cinema. He saw his engagement with films as central to his sense of identity:

'Well it just left me sitting in the house watching movies all the time and it made me think, "right, this is what I like doing" and I criticize a lot of movies now because I think, "that shouldn't work like that" and "that's not right", so it's like a main part of me now, watching movies.' (Daniel)

His comment about film being, 'like a main part of me now', illustrates how Daniel was, in Hey's (2006) terms, taking up the subject position of film buff and 'learning to identify with places in discourse' (2006, p. 446). This sense of identification through a particular art form extended to his love of comedy, which also had an impact on his interaction with others:

'Yeah I like being comical about things. I'm always up for a laugh and I like to make people laugh, it's why I get on with people. My best mate, he's called Martin, he's in my class, I get on with him really, really well because he's a...he's a chav but I get on with him because he's like a comedy kind of person and I like



getting on with people who are comedian types and we're stuck together like glue now because we're like some kind of comedy act.' (Daniel)

The significance of this for democratic learning, understood in terms of learning from the experiences of political existence and democratic subjectivity (Biesta, 2006; 2010) can be interpreted in one of two ways; on the one hand, Daniel's engagement with comedy can be seen as facilitating political existence by making him more able to engage with plurality. On the other, this identification through comedy could be seen as a barrier to genuine political existence; it was after all a sense of affinity and similarity that enabled Daniel to relate to the classmate he also saw as a 'chav', rather than a positive engagement with difference and plurality. In either case, the example illustrates how the arts can enable and preclude different kinds of interaction in the public sphere and impact on the ways in which people interact. To this extent, film and comedy played an important role in Daniel's democratic learning.

Another example of the narrative arts playing a role in the young people's democratic learning was illustrated in Dean's reflections about his future. Projecting a view of himself and his potential economic success based on stories from both 'real life' and television, Dean drew on the models and templates available in narrative culture to think through important personal and political issues:

'I've got like friends of the family who've got...who haven't had a really good life, have been poor through life and stuff with their family and then they've come out of that kind of life and got good jobs and then made money themselves which has made me, which has really inspired me because I've thought, "well, if they've been through it..." and then I've seen a lot of people on TV do it.' (Dean, interview 3).'

In exploring these potential life trajectories, Dean was able to engage with important questions about his own place in society and the political community. In doing so, he was exercising a degree of political subjectivity and, like Daniel, learning to, 'identify with places in discourse' (Hey 2006, p. 446).

Dean's reflections also illustrate the importance of Rancière's insights into the ways in which the narrative arts create fictions and provide 'channels of political subjectivisation' (2004, p. 40). Although Dean's reflections were primarily related to his personal goals and not directed towards broader political changes, they did, however, relate to more macro-level political and social issues about life chances and economic security. Importantly, they also had to do with equality. Through an engagement with certain stories, Dean was able to see himself as being just as capable of positively shaping his own future as those who had 'come out of' a particular kind of life and 'got good jobs', tellingly illustrated in his reflection that 'well if they've been through it...' His comments demonstrate that assuming

one's equality with others and imagining oneself and one's political circumstances differently is something which can take place through an engagement with narrative, in this case mediated through popular art forms such as television.

A final example of how the narrative arts were implicated in the young people's democratic learning is illustrated in Claire's increasing acceptance of unpredictability in her interactions with others, and her willingness to participate in the public sphere, as noted above. For Claire, these were accompanied by a growing acceptance of experimentation as an important part of the creative process. This was something she learned from her participation in the gallery project, where experimentation was a normal part of the artistic process under the guidance of the artist-facilitator, as Emma and Jacob's comments below illustrate:

'Laura [the artist] would like tell us a few things and to think like almost like backwards towards...like just look at things differently as you try and come up with an idea and stuff...just like experimenting.' (Emma)

'You'd start out doing something and you wouldn't know where that would actually end up.' (Jacob)

At first, Claire felt quite disconcerted by this since it represented a different approach to art making than she was used to in her experiences at school:

'I feel like there should be something more, "this is our art", not, "oh yeah there's this and there's this little thing here and we did this", but I know there's the book but that's kind of more like a collection, it's almost as if it should lead somewhere but it hasn't so...' (Claire)

However, Claire became more comfortable with this over time:

'I think everyone did really enjoy it as well because it was nice not to have to plan everything out...yeah, it was quite interesting how we could just do that.' (Claire)

This also appeared to translate into a more positive attitude towards experimentation and spontaneity in her engagement with the arts elsewhere, particularly in creative writing as part of an English course at college:

'I'm not as fussed anymore, like with English, we're doing like writing in different styles of people and the first one I did linked really well to this author and so I was just like, "fine, I'm just going to do that" and just sort of set my mind on that, whereas as we've gone through and looked at different things, I've been inspired by different things and was sort of happy to leave something behind and start on something new and just sort of try different things.' (Claire)



In this sense, Claire's democratic learning, seen in her increased acceptance of unpredictability and willingness to participate in the public sphere, was intertwined with her learning about the arts and the creative process, as expressed in her subsequent practice in relation to narrative and fiction.

8 Discussion

The findings support existing research into young people's actual citizenship (Biesta et al., 2009), and demonstrate the role of the narrative arts in particular within young people's democratic learning. They demonstrate the ways in which film and television fed into the young people's performances of subjectivity as they 'learned to identify with places in discourse' (Hey, 2006, p. 446). They also show how this was connected to their ability and readiness for the kind of political existence and democratic subjectivity that Biesta (2010) refers to in his reading of Arendt. Such connections were both positive and negative; the research shows how the arts can stifle plurality as well as how experimentation in the arts can mirror unpredictability in the public sphere and even contribute to an increased readiness for such unpredictability, and therefore for political existence. Following Rancière's insights into the ability of fiction to create 'channels of subjectivisation', (2006, p.39) the findings also show these narrative arts fed into the young people's performances of political subjectivity, providing channels through which they were able to negotiate their developing sense of themselves as democratic citizens and members of the wider political community.

The research has important implications for democratic education. On a theoretical level, it indicates that in order to understand the ways in which young people act and learn to think of themselves as social and political actors, it is also necessary to understand their engagement with popular culture and the narrative forms that surround them in their everyday lives. This also suggests that we need to think of political literacy differently; not just as a set of knowledge, skills and dispositions, but also as a general political awareness and engagement, and perhaps even a literary practice that is experienced in aesthetic ways and has an imaginative power. Importantly, the research also shows that young people's participation took different forms and that civic engagement was favored over the more overtly democratic and political. This is an important insight that merits further attention. In particular, it would be interesting to explore whether engagement with the narrative arts support some forms of participation more than others and to investigate possible links with either civic engagement or more overtly political participation.

On a practical level, the research suggests the value of employing narrative within efforts at democratic education. In mainstream schooling, this might involve the study of fiction, film and television within citizenship lessons for example. On a more holistic level, the renewal and development of cross-curricular strategies that make connections amongst subjects such as media

studies, literature and citizenship could be a useful strategy. Alternative traditions such as democratic schooling could also make use of the insights offered. Critical literacy practices that engage young people with reading, writing, viewing and critically discussing their responses to fiction and film could make a positive contribution to radical approaches to democratic education. These strategies and practices could be useful in terms of allowing students to explicitly consider their own developing political subjectivity within a world full of both diverse political experiences, and narratives that shape our understanding of, and engagement in, it. Schools and other educational contexts could also make use of the narrative arts to help encourage positive attitudes towards the kinds of unpredictability and spontaneity that can create the conditions necessary for democratic subjectivity. In this way, the narrative arts could contribute towards schools providing more opportunities for political existence and democratic learning.

9 Conclusion

The research reported here offers an illustration of the ways in which the narrative arts played a role in the particular performances of political subjectivity enacted by a number of young people engaged in the arts over a period of two years. It also demonstrates how these impacted on their democratic learning. The insights it offers are limited to a small number of cases and some of the findings are specific to the historical and political context of the UK at the time of the research. In their particularity, they are not generalisable to young people as a whole. However, in illustrating the processes involved in the ways young people take up positions within available discourses, they illuminate the role of the narrative arts in young people's democratic learning. As well as carrying some important implications for educational practice, the research points to some very interesting theoretical questions about how we conceptualise political literacy, democratic participation and civic engagement. At a time when the most radical forms of political activism amongst young people make explicit use of artistic strategies, and debates over the educational impact of fiction, film and television continue to be hotly contested, these questions are highly pertinent. This paper makes a specific contribution to these questions by offering some insights into the real impacts of the narrative arts within young people's democratic learning and by opening up new questions about the aesthetic and artistic dimensions of their civic and political engagement.

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Jennifer Tupper

Social Media and the Idle No More Movement: Citizenship, Activism and Dissent in Canada

This paper, informed by a critique of traditional understandings of citizenship and civic education, explores the use of social media as a means of fostering activism and dissent. Specifically, the paper explores the ways in which the Idle No More Movement, which began in Canada in 2012 marshalled social media to educate about and protest Bill C-45, an omnibus budget bill passed by the Federal Government. The paper argues that Idle No More is demonstrative of young people's commitments to social change and willingness to participate in active forms of dissent. As such, it presents opportunities for fostering ethically engaged citizenship through greater knowledge and awareness of Indigenous issues in Canada, which necessarily requires an understanding of the historical and contemporary legacies of colonialism that continually position First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples as 'lesser' citizens. Finally, the paper suggests that the example of Idle No More stands in contrast to the notion of a "civic vacuum" that is often used to justify the re-entrenchment of traditional civic education programs in schools and as such, can be used as a pedagogic tool to teach for and about dissent.

Keywords:

citizenship, civic education, activism, dissent, colonialism, Idle No More, social media

1 Introduction

In this paper, I trouble traditional civic education programs that focus almost exclusively on rights and responsibilities, including the newly proposed citizenship curriculum in Saskatchewan. I argue such approaches increasingly alienate young people and fail to acknowledge the creative, critical and varied ways in which citizenship is and might be expressed, particularly in the context of the digital age in which we live. More specifically, I draw on the Idle No More Movement that began in the province of Saskatchewan in December 2012 as a study of critical citizenship and activism that engaged multiple generations and marshalled social media as a means of messaging, organizing, critiquing, and speaking back to Federal Bill C-45, and other related colonial practices discussed more thoroughly later in this paper. I explore the participation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people in Idle No More as an example

of ethically engaged civic activism (Tupper, 2012) and examine specific uses of social media to generate global momentum for the movement and greater awareness of Indigenous issues. Further, I argue that in Canada, critical citizenship necessarily requires an understanding of the historical and contemporary legacies of colonialism that continually position First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples as 'lesser' citizens. I believe that how we understand ourselves as Canadian citizens requires a consideration of colonialism although opportunities for such a consideration are largely absent in citizenship curriculum in Saskatchewan. Finally, I suggest that the example of Idle No More stands in contrast to the notion of a "civic vacuum" that is often used to justify the re-entrenchment of traditional civic education programs in schools and as such, can be used as a pedagogic tool to teach for dissent.

2 Citizenship education

Currently in Saskatchewan, the western Canadian province where I live and work, efforts are being made to implement a comprehensive citizenship education curriculum in schools. Titled "Rights, Responsibilities and Respect: Enduring Understanding for Citizenship Education" the formal document situates the need for this curriculum within a "civics vacuum manifesting itself across democratic systems across the world" (2014, p. 4). It does not however, situate citizenship within a colonial context nor ask students to consider how citizenship has been differentially experienced by Canadians over time, depending on their social locations. Rather, the rights and responsibilities approach that orients this proposed curriculum re-entrenches dominant considerations of citizenship, and may be understood as both a response to the decline in traditional forms of civic participation

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and to a re-centring of their importance to citizenship education.

Concerns about the health of Canadian (and American) democracy are not new, particularly in light of declining voter turnout, lower rates of membership in political parties, and levels of political knowledge and political interest (Bennett, 2008; Milner, 2008). Journall, Ayers & Beeson (2013) note that “much has been written about the civic disengagement of American youth...younger Americans tend to display more characteristics of civic apathy” (466). Similarly, worry about the lack of knowledge of political issues possessed by young people is pervasive (Putnam, 2000; Snell, 2010). Moreover, in a meta-analysis of research exploring the impact of youth participation, Youniss & Yates (1996) noted that civically engaged young people who possess more comprehensive political knowledge had a greater sense of agency, ability, and self-esteem. Recent research has noted a shift in patterns of democratic participation whereby young people have higher levels of participation in non-traditional activities (Bennet, 2008; Dalton, 2008; Levine, 2011).

In the context of citizenship education, civic engagement, and activism, it is important to be attentive to how young people are both expressing and enacting citizenship and how school curriculum invites them to do so (Tupper, Cappello & Sevigny, 2010). It is also essential to consider whether the forms of engagement advanced through curriculum are indicative of “benevolent discourses of helping others” (Andreotti & Pashby, 2013) that may actually reproduce rather than critique inequity. Such discourses may also be produced through public dialogue that highlights and applauds certain forms of civic engagement while bemoaning an overall lack of engagement by young people in traditional citizenship activities such as voting. Taken together, school curricula and public discourses of citizenship have the potential to advance dominant constructions of citizenship, influencing the ways in which young people understand and negotiate their civic identities. Bennet (2008) argues that citizenship curriculum is “often stripped of independent opportunities for young people to embrace and communicate about politics on their own terms” (7). He goes on to state that in schools, traditional citizenship education, which lacks the critical component discussed above, has created a disconnection between students and their involvement in democratic processes and structures. In turn, the viability of a healthy and robust democracy, which necessarily requires critique and dissent, is undermined.

From their important research of civic education in the United States, Westheimer & Kahne (2004) created a framework for understanding teachers’ approaches to teaching about and for citizenship. The researchers describe one approach as personally responsible citizenship which they suggest, focuses on the exercise of individual rights and responsibilities, while participatory citizenship requires a more engaged and involved approach, such as organizing a food drive. Their justice

oriented conceptualization of citizenship involves a more sustained critique of and critical approach to understanding political and social structures, in contrast to dominant discourses which often circulate in curriculum and teaching practices. Westheimer & Kahne found that the least often utilized approach to civic education was justice-oriented, with teachers preferring to take up the personally responsible and participatory approaches in their classrooms.

Central to Saskatchewan’s proposed curriculum is the development of citizens “who actively investigate and interpret their rights and responsibilities as Canadian citizens and participate in democracy” (p. 6). With a focus on engaged citizens, life-long learning, and strong sense of self, community and place, the document advances personally responsible and participatory models of citizenship that are steeped in the benevolent discourses Andreotti and Pashby (2013) are critical of, as well as discourses of universality that fail to account for ongoing socio-political inequity (Tupper, 2009; 2012). Notably absent from the document, and indeed troubling, is a commitment to critical citizenship, activism or any consideration of the ways in which these can be lived out by young people, especially in a colonial context such as exists in Canada

Sears (2010) maintains that a ‘key component of citizenship in any country is the people’s identification with the nation’ (193). In liberal democracies like Canada, citizenship may be understood as a national ethic, in which individual rights and civic participation are valued. Critiques of liberal democratic discourses of citizenship highlight existing inequities amongst citizens despite the existence of rights legislation (Pateman, 1989; Pearce & Hallgarten, 2000; Phillips, 1998; Siim, 2000; Tupper, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Young, 2000). Often, these citizenship narratives depend on the veracity of Canada as a fair and just nation even though examples to the contrary are numerous (Burrows, 2013). In Saskatchewan, set against the backdrop of colonialism, a system of Indian Residential schools reflects a dark side of this province’s past, and indeed Canada’s history. This system allowed for the forcible removal of young children from their home communities as early as five years old, to attend schools with the expressed goal of assimilation. Various forms of abuse were experienced by these children, and Canada, through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is only now attempting to make amends to residential school survivors. Other examples in contrast to the dominant narrative of Canada as fair and just nation are not limited to the past. Rather, ongoing conditions of oppression exist in this country, positioning many citizens as less than, preventing them from full participation in democratic processes and leaving them deeply suspicious of federal and provincial governments (Tupper, 2009; Tupper et al. 2010).

With this in mind, critical civic engagement is vital not only to the integrity of democracy, but to social justice work that aims to interrogate the ways in which a national citizenship ethic, corresponding political



structures, and political processes continually position/produce some citizens and groups of citizens as marginal. Andreotti (2006) describes critical citizenship education as necessarily acknowledging the dangers of imagining one common way forward, one common future for all people, a universal citizenship ethic, regardless of specific cultures and contexts. This critical form of civic engagement, rooted in expressions of dissent “holds great possibility for improved democratic living” insofar as it challenges unjust norms or laws (Stitzlein, 2012, p. 52). Stitzlein (2012) advocates the teaching of dissent in citizenship education as a means of fostering political activism. For her, learning must involve interrogating the role of dissent or consensus in citizenship education curriculum. She states,

Without considerable efforts to integrate, mediate, and discuss dissent inside and outside of schools, schools are failing to prepare students for democracy as it currently exists around them...Theorists and practitioners of democratic education should seize the opportunity to simultaneously prepare students for both democracy as it exists and democracy as it ideally should be (114).

In light of Stitzlein’s work, and in consideration of my own critiques of banal citizenship education, I examine the potential of social media for critical citizenship. Specifically, I turn to the Idle No More movement as an example of how young people are endeavouring to participate in democracy as it currently exists in Canada, and as it might exist. Social media became a focal point for mobilization and education as citizens, many of whom were Aboriginal, organized their opposition to Bill C-45. This movement provides numerous examples of civic engagement in both online and real spaces. It also offers opportunities to understand and consider the significance of colonialism for citizenship; as such, I argue that Idle No More allows us to re-imagine how citizenship education might be taught not only in Saskatchewan, but throughout Canada.

3 Ongoing colonialism in Canada

Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) describe colonialism as “the specific formation of colonialism in which the colonizer comes to stay, making himself the sovereign, and the arbiter of citizenship, civility and knowing” (73). This conceptualization is pertinent to understanding the history of Aboriginal-Canadian relations, particularly as this history continues to inform Canada’s current social, political and economic realities. As I have argued elsewhere (see Tupper 2008a, 2008b, 2009 & 2012, in press), Aboriginal people in Canada have been prohibited from experiencing their individual rights in society and from active civic engagement by virtue of being Aboriginal.

Despite this lived reality, the citizenship education that students encounter in schools often fails to account for the differential distribution of rights (Rubin, 2007;

Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). This is partly because the rights of citizenship entrenched through constitutionalism that inform Canada’s national ethic are believed to be granted universally to individuals regardless of their social locations (Tupper, Cappello & Sevigny, 2010; Tupper, 2012). Yet Canada’s colonial legacy has meant that Aboriginal peoples have struggled to experience their full rights as citizens. I have written about this in the context of the ongoing disappearances and murders of Aboriginal women, unsafe drinking water on First Nations reserves and the over-policing of Aboriginal peoples (Tupper, 2009). These examples are illustrative of the inequitable enactment of the rights of citizenship in Canada. In addition to citizenship rights, Aboriginal peoples in Canada have also been subjected to erosion of their treaty rights, and in some cases, a complete failure by Government to honour these rights from the time the treaties were signed despite their foundational importance (LeRat, 2005; Miller, 2009). Specifically, many First Nations communities in Saskatchewan were not granted the reserve land they requested following the signing of the numbered treaties (1870-1921) with the British Crown. Further, the creation of the Indian Act in 1876 undermined the treaty relationship as one of “brother to brother” to one of “parent and child” with the Government taking on a paternalistic role, thereby constructing First Nations people as children. The Act set forth the terms through which Aboriginal communities would be governed by the state, creating the conditions for the system of residential schools, the pass system which regulated the movement of First Nations between reserves, the banning of traditional ceremonies, and the overall disenfranchisement of the first peoples.

Recently, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada relocated their offices from the First Nations University of Canada, located on Treaty 4 land in Southern Saskatchewan. Shortly after their move, a number of commemorative treaty medals were found in a dumpster behind the University. The irony of this was not lost on First Nations communities and their allies. The act of casting aside the treaty medals, which depict a handshake between a First Nations chief and government agent, is symbolic of the historical and contemporary tensions between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian Government. These tensions, and the differential experiences of the rights of citizenship, have most certainly contributed to the Idle No More movement.

4 Marshalling social media for activism and dissent

Dimitriadis (2014) notes schools continue to play an important role in determining what knowledge is most valuable for students to access. He comments “social media is an arena where notions of what is ‘most valuable’ can be struggled over. Technologies like facebook and Twitter are playing new roles in generating different social formations and promoting social change” (11). Similarly, in a recent issue of the publication *Education Canada*, Hunter & Austin (2014) articulate the opportunities afforded for community development



through the use of online learning and digital technologies. While not specifically connecting these with the possibilities they present for engaged citizenship, there are obvious linkages. For example, the call to link young people in numerous locations around the world to work together in educational initiatives, projects, and research reflects the uses of digital technology for citizenship education.

Bhimji (2007) asserts that alternative learning spaces outside the formal context of k-12 education “facilitate expressions, understandings, and negotiation of identities among young people” (29). Further, Bhimji argues that young people are able to assert their “multilayered identities such that they are civic, politicized, urban and young while they simultaneously claim their right to belong.” In these alternative digital learning spaces, connections are made to students’ ability to enact their identities in “self-empowering ways” that facilitate awareness of larger systemic inequities (30). The example offered through Bhimji’s research is of critically engaged citizenship.

In their study of Twitter as a tool for political engagement, Journall, Ayers & Walker Beeson (2013) argue that social media has become “the latest battleground for politics in the United States” (467). Research with students attending a specific high school in North Carolina, and enrolled in a Civics and Economics Course explored the course requirement for students to use Twitter as a vehicle to respond to and learn about the Federal Election. While the researchers express concern about social media as a means for politically intolerant commentary they note that Twitter provides “an outlet for students, who are typically excluded from the political process, to have their voices heard with a larger political arena than what they would typically find at home or at school (476).

Middaugh and Kahne (2013) explored the challenges and possibilities of experiential civic education in school settings. They argue that service learning opportunities can create youth civic engagement through its aims of engaging “youth in the authentic practice of doing civic work, but the norms and structures of school do not necessarily support this kind of practice” (101). As such, they maintain that new media is being used more often as a tool for enabling and organizing civic and political activities. They note the studies of Smith (2010) and Earl & Kimport (2010) as focussing on the ways in which youth and adults are marshalling media and social networks to not only keep informed of social and political issues, connect with civic and political institutions, but also to engage in activism. Like Middaugh and Kahne, Samuels (2010) suggests that young peoples’ reliance on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube is directly connected to communicating and organizing social movements and may be understood as a “new way of interacting with the world” (33). This is born out in Biddix’s (2010) research examining the uses of digital technologies in fostering activism. He notes the uses of Facebook, texting, and Google for connecting with others

and extending learning environments beyond the boundaries of more traditional, less mobile technologies. However, as Bennett (2008) cautions, we need to be attentive to whether it is the “usual suspects” [members of the dominant socio-political group] participating in these spaces (3).

In their research, Estanque, Costa and Soeiro (2013) discuss the recent examples of activism that have occurred within and beyond countries. While they focus on these new “waves of global protests” in the context of changes to labour realities and material issues, their research speaks to the value of activism and dissent as a means of speaking back to those in power, both economically and politically (31). They write,

Since late 2010 and early 2011, we have witnessed a new cycle of global mobilizations. With significant differences according to the contexts in which they occur, its agendas and modes of action, many of the protests that have erupted in several countries share a set of features and are interconnected. They reveal, in different ways, a crisis of legitimacy of political actors, widespread dissatisfaction with the responses in the face of economic crisis and concern about the processes of labour precarization that are today a strong global trend...(38)

The authors describe a recent social demonstration that took place in Portugal “as an expression of some of the features in this emerging type of mobilization, where youth play a leading role” (31).

Common throughout all of these studies is recognition that social media provide opportunities for engaged citizenship, activism, and dissent through inter-connectivity. The Idle No More movement exemplifies how isolated forms of initial dissent and civic engagement can grow exponentially through the use of social media. Further, the digital presence of Idle No More exemplifies active struggles over dominant knowledge systems in Canada. The origins of the movement, rooted in a critique of ongoing colonialism in Canada, and the many failures of the Government to honour the spirit and intent of the Treaties as well as failures to consult with First Nations people about proposed legislation, became a platform for digitally educating, informing, and inviting activism on the part of Canadians.

5 Idle No More as civic engagement, activism & dissent

The Idle No More movement began in Saskatchewan, in late 2012 when four women, Sheelah McLean, Nina Wilson, Sylvia McAdam, and Jessica Gordon, began to exchange emails about the Conservative Government’s omnibus budget bill, C-45. Specifically, they shared with one another their concerns that the Bill further threatened the numbered treaties entered into in the late 1800s by the British Crown and First Nations people in Western Canada. The already fragile treaty relationship (as a result of many missteps on the part of the Canadian Government) established in and through the numbered



treaties, was perceived to be even more precarious in light of the terms of Bill C-45. The Bill, over 400 pages in length, alters the legislation contained in 64 acts or regulations.

Of greatest concern to the founders of Idle No more were the changes to the Indian Act, the Navigation Protection Act, and the Environmental Assessment Act. Under the changes to the Navigation Protection Act, major pipeline and power line projects have no requirement to provide assurances that the projects will not damage or destroy navigable waterway they cross, unless the waterway is included on a list of waterways prepared by the transportation minister. With respect to changes to the Environmental Assessment Act, the number of projects requiring an environmental assessment was reduced and the approval process made faster.

Not only were the four women founders of Idle No More concerned about the changes to the various acts contained in Bill C-45, they were also deeply troubled by what they perceived to be a lack of consultation with Aboriginal peoples regarding the changes. As such, they determined that they could not be silent nor could they be idle. Further, they recognized the importance of raising local and national awareness of the terms of the Bill, and taking widespread action to protest these terms as a form of civic dissent. According to the official website of Idle No More, the impetus for the movement,

...lies in a centuries old resistance as Indigenous nations and their lands suffered the impacts of exploration, invasion and colonization. Idle No More seeks to assert Indigenous inherent rights to sovereignty and reinstitute traditional laws and Nation to Nation Treaties by protecting the lands and waters from corporate destruction. Each day that Indigenous rights are not honored or fulfilled, inequality between Indigenous peoples and the settler society grows (www.idlenomore/story).

The movement quickly became one of the largest in Canadian history, an example of engaged citizenship, dissent and activism writ large. Through numerous teach ins, rallies, protests, flash mob round dances, and other related actions, Idle No More became part of public dialogue, debate and consciousness. What is noteworthy is the means through which the movement grew and spread so rapidly across Canada and globally. Social media figured prominently in garnering the participation of young people in the movement. A Facebook page was swiftly established to highlight the goals of Idle No More, followed shortly thereafter by the use of Twitter.

Twitter, and 'tweeting', allow for extensively broadcasting and responding to digital messages. News agencies, politicians, activists, academics, etc, are more frequently marshalling Twitter to increase awareness of local and global issues, ideas and noteworthy news stories. Twitter hashtags, singled by the use of # in front of a descriptor, can track interest, referred to as trending, in particular tweets. For example, CBC News

reported that the use of the Twitter hashtag, #IdleNoMore facilitated the spread of information and the organization of various events and actions. It did not take long for #IdleNoMore to trend on Twitter (www.cbc.ca/news/canada/9-questions-about-idle-no-more-1.1301843). To date, @IdleNoMore has 21,700 followers and has generated just under 5000 tweets pertaining to Aboriginal issues in Canada. Idle No More also has a digital presence on the social networking site Facebook, with over 127,000 likes since the page was created. The Facebook page (www.facebook.com/IdleNoMoreCommunity) highlights news articles referencing events organized by the movement along with various ways to actively learn about and support the movement, especially as they relate to critiques of government policy, processes and the corresponding experiences of ongoing colonialism. It aims to create a broad community of individuals who share the movement's concerns. Thus, social media has become an important tool of communication, education, and ethically engaged citizenship extending across and beyond Canada's national borders.

6 Ethically engaged citizenship

Through following the Idle No More Movement on Twitter, many of my undergraduate social studies teacher education students and I attended a Flash Mob Round Dance at the University of Regina in January 2013. It was an opportunity to learn more about the concerns expressed by Idle No More, to participate in public dissent and to engage in peaceful activism. It facilitated continued considerations of colonialism in the context of engaged citizenship. Several students shared that it was their first experience of engaged citizenship through which they felt empowered and determined to further express their support for the movement and their concerns about Bill C-45. They spoke about the meaningfulness of being alongside hundreds of people and the opportunity for solidarity in speaking back to the Government. The event facilitated the chance for what I have described elsewhere, as ethically engaged citizenship, which is a commitment to social change through being in relation to one another rather than working toward social change in benevolent ways on behalf of the 'other' (Tupper, 2012). It necessitates deeply considering the implications of colonialism for Aboriginal-Canadian relations and asks us to consider what our ethical responsibilities as citizens of Canada might be to First Nations people, individually and collectively.

Ethically engaged citizenship draws on Donald's (2009) conceptualization of ethical relationality in order to critique how the substantive experiences of liberal democratic citizenship have been differentially produced. Donald notes that ethical relationality requires a deep consideration of the histories of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada in order to facilitate being in ethical relation. I argue the need for all Canadians to have an ethically engaged disposition so that they may "be always mindful of how individual



behaviours and choices support or undermine relationships with First Nations peoples. Canadians will be unable to engage ethically with one another if we fail to understand what it means to be in relation" (Tupper, 2012, p. 153). Thus, ethically engaged citizenship must be a central concern in citizenship education programs.

Because Idle No More had such a digital presence, I was able to use it as a teaching tool with some of my undergraduate teacher education social studies majors to support my commitment to critical and ethically engaged citizenship. Following our participation in the Flash Mob Round Dance and our experiences of being in relation, several students and I met informally to discuss the concerns embedded in the Idle No More movement. Our conversation was an extension of the learning students had just participated in through their attendance at a two day Treaty Education Workshop offered by the Office of the Treaty Commissioner in Saskatchewan in which they grappled with the historical and contemporary legacies of colonialism. The students were particularly interested in making connections between treaty failures and the impetus for Idle No More, especially failure related to a commitment to share the land in consultative ways. We talked together about further possibilities for learning, activism and dissent that supported an ongoing critique of colonialism in Canada, notably absent in the existing and proposed citizenship education curriculum in Saskatchewan.

The students considered the implications of Idle No More for their own approaches to citizenship education when they had classrooms of their own. They articulated the significance of moving away from a passive, textbook based approach to citizenship which is common in many schools in Saskatchewan (though there are most certainly exceptions). Recently, one of these students sent me a tweet expressing her gratitude for the opportunity to participate in activism and dissent. I can only hope that she will extend similar opportunities to the students she is alongside in her teaching career, and that she will do so with the aim of fostering ethically engaged citizenship.

7 Conclusion

In his work, Levine (2009) is critical of schools and their corresponding civic education programs and for what he perceives to be their failures in creating opportunities for students to actually become engaged with social and political issues, especially in light of the ways in which social media may be marshalled for civic participation. As educators, we must be attentive to the civic opportunity gap he speaks of, especially those of us directly involved in citizenship education, whether in the context of social studies, history, or other subject areas. These concerns are born out in the ways citizenship has been framed within a context of individual rights and responsibilities. This is not to suggest that individual rights and responsibilities are not important, because they most certainly are. However, knowledge of these does not necessarily require critical engagement with democratic systems and

structures which differentially produce individuals as citizens depending upon their social and racial locations.

As I noted early in this discussion, the proposed civic education curriculum in Saskatchewan makes no explicit reference to social media and its many uses for fostering engaged citizenship for young people. Nor does it consider citizenship within a colonial context. And yet, this province is the birthplace of the Idle No More Movement. Idle No More could not have had the immediate and pervasive impact it has without social media. Young people could not have engaged as extensively as they have and continue to within this movement if not for social media. It stands as a powerful example of activism and dissent because it could so quickly and so broadly connect with individuals who then became part of the larger social movement. Some may only have followed the movement on Facebook or Twitter, never attending a rally, flash mob, teach-in, or protest. Even so, they were learning about significant social and political issues in Canada, and perhaps for the first time, were encountering these issues through anti-colonial discourses. Others may have participated for the first time in one or more of these events, sparking an ongoing interest in activism. While there is no published research to date on the meaningfulness of this social movement for young people, I observed its power with many of my own students and have been deeply appreciative of the opportunities it has afforded me to continue teaching for ethically engaged citizenship and to continue supporting my commitment to reconciliation with First Nations peoples in Canada.

Herrara (2014) points out that "compared to previous generations, youth coming of age in the digital era are learning and exercising citizenship in fundamentally different ways"(20). The uses of social media for teaching about and for critical citizenship and dissent, as illustrated through a consideration of the Idle No More movement, hold promise for ameliorating concerns that young people are not interested in and therefore will not participate in the political realm. My experiences with Idle No More have revealed to me just how deeply young people care about and want to be involved in a movement that aims to speak back to government policy that further undermines and erodes the treaty relationship in Canada. Although Bill C-45 was passed into legislation, the movement continues to invite Canadians to express dissent, participate in activism, and engage in new opportunities for learning about the history of the country in more ethically relational ways. As Middaugh & Kahne (2013) note, "new media has played an important role in helping youth engage in critical thinking about social issues" (105). In light of the unique historical moment of "widespread political dissent currently unfolding" around the world and its reliance on social media to critique, educate and organize, the conditions for critical citizenship education in schools and elsewhere become more possible (Stitzlein, 2012, p. 189).



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Frank Reichert

The Prediction of Political Competencies by Political Action and Political Media Consumption

Political competencies are often considered a precondition for political action; however, they are not independent of previous political participation, which may also include the frequency and the kind of political media consumption. My research aims at finding out the importance of participation in political activities in the past, as well as taking over civic responsibility in positions at school or university for cognitive political competencies. The focus is on structural political knowledge of the polity, symbolic political knowledge about political figures and actors, and political reasoning. The main hypothesis reads that the media primarily influence symbolic political knowledge, while structural political knowledge is mainly achieved by active political participation. The ability of political reasoning is assumed to be equally influenced by both, media consumption and political participation. By using a small, homogeneous sample of university students, these hypotheses are examined by taking into consideration socio-demographic control variables and political interest in statistical analyses and by considering differential effects of various political activities and different forms of political media consumption. The results are primarily discussed with respect to potential future research and by considering political education in modern societies.

Keywords:

Political competencies, political action, political knowledge, political media, political reasoning, students

1 Introduction

It is a commonplace that every democratic society needs a politically competent and engaged citizenry. The acquisition of political competencies by a country's citizens and their active participation in politics are therefore significant for the legitimization of democratic constituted political systems. In this connection, political competencies are often considered a precondition for political action; however, they are not independent of previous political participation. Moreover, the frequency and the kind of political media consumption—e.g., tabloids, broadsheet newspapers, television, Internet—may also be understood as some sort of participation and, thus, are further conditions to be taken into account, in particular when predicting political knowledge. Consequently, this paper aims to analyse the influence of these variables on different kinds of political knowledge and on political reasoning.

This is sought to be a *pilot study* which was conducted as part of a larger project and which aims to identify variables that have to be considered in future civic education research. This study was a first attempt of the researcher to explore possible correlations between cognitive

political competencies and political participation in a wider understanding, i.e. including political media consumption and past activities at school and university. The paper's key research questions circle around the issues of the possible differences of various political/civic activities' shaping of political competencies among highly educated people. This also comprises the usage of different mass media and its effects on political knowledge acquisition and the question whether the media or active political participation are more important in the prediction of political knowledge and the ability of political reasoning. The central aim of this paper is better to understand requirements for subsequent studies, in particular the identification of possible challenges and indicators that need to be measured when it comes to the prediction of political competencies by political behaviour. Is it necessary to distinguish different kinds of political behaviour and between the uses of different types of the mass media? Can we identify specific effects on different cognitive political competencies or do we—empirically—find the same effects for each of the competencies we may differentiate conceptually? This is also incredibly important with respect to questionnaire economy as no scholar would like to “waste” questionnaire space on items that need not to be measured because of constructs that largely overlap in empirical regards. Furthermore, every researcher would prefer to keep any inconvenience study participants might experience (e.g., investment of time to fill in a questionnaire) to the lowest degree possible.

The following section provides the reader with the theoretical framework of this article and familiarizes with the concepts which are used. Although the study was meant to be a first approach to explore the topic by the author, it did by no means start from scratch but could

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build on other works and theoretical considerations. The third section sketches the existing empirical evidence and develops some hypotheses based on those findings, even though the present study was primarily supposed to explore relationships. After the methodology has been described in more detail, the results will be presented in section four. After a comparison and integration of the analyses, a discussion of the findings relates these back to the aims of the study and provides the reader with some conclusions that may be drawn from this study. The results are also discussed considering the importance of contemporary political education and the provision of political media in modern societies.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Political competencies

Political competence can be defined as the ability to understand, judge, and successfully influence politics and political facts (e.g., Gabriel 2008). Key political competencies are the ability to analyse and judge political incidents, problems and decisions on one's own (*political analysing and reasoning*), to formulate one's own political positions, convictions and opinions, and to advocate them in political negotiations (*capacity to act politically*), and *methodical abilities* (Detjen, 2013; GPJE, 2004; Krammer, 2008; Sander, 2008). In addition, *political knowledge* can be defined "as the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory" (Delli Carpini/Keeter, 1996, p. 10). Political knowledge, especially conceptual knowledge – i.e. knowledge about political concepts and procedures – goes as a basic precondition for the acquisition of the previously mentioned three competencies (GPJE, 2004; Krammer, 2008; Richter, 2008; Sander, 2008). Therefore, the possession of political knowledge and its recall can be seen as a component of objective political competence: political knowledge is a "content-related competence" and, thus, a central part of political basic education and more or less a political competence itself (Richter, 2008; Weißeno, 2009; compare also Hoskins et al. 2008; Rychen, 2004), because it has to be acquired, must be stored and should be available. This claim is decidedly true since Torney-Purta (1995) states the political as a special and fourth basic knowledge domain besides biology, physics, and psychology – thus, politics require an own domestic-specific thinking and problem-solving on the foundation of domain-related knowledge.

As it is difficult to adequately measure *all* objective competencies, the focus is only on the cognitive dimension (but not on the methodical or agency dimension). On the one hand, this dimension contains the competence of political analysing and reasoning (short: political reasoning); on the other hand, political knowledge as "content-related competence" and basic prerequisite for all the other political competencies is part of it (Schulz et al. 2010). In addition, for political knowledge the differentiation between two facets seems reasonable: Johann (2012) stated that we should distinguish between knowledge of political figures, i.e.

'symbolic' political knowledge of political actors etc., and knowledge of political rules, i.e. 'structural' political knowledge, especially knowledge of the polity. Although not totally separated, they still are distinct types of political knowledge (Westle, 2005). Furthermore, this division is similar to what Jennings (1996) called "textbook knowledge" of the mechanics of the political system versus "surveillance knowledge"¹ of current political events and politicians, and this distinction is supported by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) as well. Thus, it may also be important to distinguish between at least two kinds of political knowledge in the present study as those kinds might be differently affected by the different political activities people engage in.

2.2 Political action

"Political participation" or "political action" or "political behaviour" consists of every voluntary activity a citizen takes to influence authoritative or generally binding regulations and decisions on any of the different levels of the political system (Kaase, 1992, p. 339). Based on existing literature (e.g., Barnes et al. 1979; Steinbrecher 2009), we may distinguish four kinds of political action: *Electoral* political participation—voting—does not require intense effort, nor is it bound by a strong commitment. The only constraint on voting is formal regulations (e.g., citizenship). *Conventional* political activities are traditional, party-related forms of participation. These are often institutionalized, require some commitment as well as a higher investment of time by the activists and are sometimes called "party politics" (e.g., supporting an election campaign). *Unconventional* activities refer to a broad range of less time-intensive or committed political participation activities outside the realm of political parties. These do in fact have a long tradition in many Western countries and are nowadays also often referred to as "protest activities" (e.g., signing a petition, distributing leaflets). Finally, *non-normative*, illegal political activities are those that are located outside the legal framework (e.g., attending a violent demonstration).

2.3 Student participation

For young people to obtain a proper minimum of political knowledge and skills, also schools play an important role (e.g., Davies et al., 2006; Niemi/Junn, 1998; Print, 2012; see also below)—not only because of civic education which is taught at schools as a school subject, at least in Germany. At school students can gather first experiences in an environment which may (or may not) provide opportunities actively to shape the own community, which in this respect is the school. For example, pupils who engage in school elections are more knowledgeable and prone to engage in the political realm (e.g., Saha & Print, 2010). However, students can participate in more ways at school and later also at university, e.g., in student councils, in various elections or even in protest movements. It is thus reasonable not only to focus on mere political activities, but also to account for

participation in collectives which young people experience directly almost every day.

2.4 Political media

Besides the aforementioned political activities which may also be defined as “participative political action”, following Niedermayer (2001, p. 131) it is reasonable to define the use of media as “communicative” or communication-oriented political action. This is indeed very plausible as people who actively seek for political information to some extent will undertake actions to get politically informed. In many regards, political information then will be gathered from the mass media; although many people probably consume political information by accident or absent-mindedly. Although research suggests that we may need to disentangle the effects of the different kinds of media, media content etc. on political knowledge (e.g., Barabas & Jerit, 2009; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Fraile & Iyengar, 2014; Galston, 2001; Norris, 1996; Prior, 2005), it may well be argued that the mass media is probably one of the most important sources for the acquisition of political knowledge, whether or not used purposefully to acquire political information.

Whereas the emergence of the television led to a strong personalization of politics (McAllister, 2007), providing more superficial information, other media, particularly newspapers, remain sources of more detailed political information (Chaffee & Frank, 1996). The use of mass media for the purpose of political information increases political knowledge, though particularly newspapers affect political knowledge positively (Fraile, 2011; Valentino & Nardis, 2013, p. 571f.). Even compared to the Internet, print versions of newspapers seem to be more influential in the learning process of citizens (Eveland & Dunwoody, 2001; Tewksbury & Althaus, 2000). However, recent research suggests that online news readers are seeking detailed information, too (e.g., Poynter Institute, 2008; Fraile, 2011). Self-selectivity results in an even increasing knowledge gap with respect to political information (e.g., Kim, 2008; Prior, 2005) which may be intensified by the existence of the Internet (e.g., McAllister & Gibson, 2011; Wei & Hindman, 2011).

Hence, when analysing effects of media use on political knowledge, we have to account for the frequency and kind of medium (e.g. Horstmann, 1991). Here it is also important to consider differences within specific mass media, such as broadsheet versus tabloid newspapers or public versus commercial/private broadcasting, because exposure to those outlets with high levels of political content (i.e. public television news and broadsheets) contributes the most to increases in or higher levels of political knowledge (e.g. de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Fraile & Iyengar, 2014; Holtz-Bacha & Norris, 2001; Milner, 2002). Again it is worth mentioning that this is not a one-way path, but political media exposure and political knowledge both affect each other (e.g., Atkin, Galloway & Nayman, 1976).

3 Method

The present study was conducted as part of a larger project which did not primarily focus on cognitive politicization (see Reichert, 2013; Simon, Reichert & Grabow, 2013; Simon et al. 2014). This sub-study is a first attempt of the researcher to explore possible correlations between cognitive political competencies and political participation in a wider understanding, i.e. including political media consumption and past activities at school and university. The main aim of this research is to better understand requirements for subsequent research, in particular the identification of possible challenges and indicators that need to be measured when it will come to the prediction of political competencies by political behaviour. In order to examine potential associations and to identify the needs of appropriate measurements for future research, the present study was carried out as a pilot study. Although working hypotheses could be derived from previous research.

3.1 Predicting political competencies: Hypotheses

Predicting political competencies often relies on the same models that predict political action. At the individual level, biological variables like, for instance, personality traits (e.g., Mondak et al., 2010; Quintelier, 2012) or genetics (e.g., Fowler, Baker & Dawes, 2008; Hatemi et al., 2007) have been taken into consideration recently. Traditionally, politicization is explained by demographics (e.g. age, gender), the existence of resources (e.g. status, income; see Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978), or social capital (esp. social networks; cf. Putnam, 1993; 2000); by the political values and attitudes of individuals; and by political interest, political efficacy and past political behaviour (e.g., Balch, 1974; Galston, 2001; van Deth, 2001) (cf. Steinbrecher, 2009; Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995).

Hence, political competencies, including knowledge, usually increase with age, and a body of evidence suggests that those who are better educated as well as males² are more politically competent (e.g., Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996; Gaiser, Gille & de Rijke, 2010; Gidengil et al. 2004; Grönlund & Milner, 2006; Krampen, 1991; 2000; Kuhn, 2006; Maier, 2000; van Deth, 2013; Vetter, 2006; Weißeno & Eck, 2013; Westle, 2005; 2012), even though Schulz et al. (2010) did not find an effect for gender on political knowledge. Furthermore, people have higher levels of political knowledge after political elections compared to before political elections (Maier, 2009; Westle, 2012).

Studies have also demonstrated that especially *political interest*—often defined as the “degree to which politics arouses a citizen’s curiosity” (van Deth, 1990, p. 278) and which comprises political awareness or attentiveness (cf. Zaller 1992)—and *internal political efficacy*, also known as “subjective political competence”, i.e. the feeling that one is capable to understand political facts and processes and to take political influence—the feeling of being politically powerful on one’s own (cf. Almond & Verba, 1965; Balch, 1974; Campbell, Gurin & Miller, 1954)—correlate

positively with objective political competencies (e.g., Fischer, 1997; Maier, 2000; Vetter & Maier, 2005; Weißeno & Eck, 2013; Westle, 2005; 2006). Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that internal political efficacy reflects political knowledge and political competencies in general (cf. Reichert 2010).

For respondents with Turkish migration history, Westle (2011; 2012) also identified a positive relationship between political knowledge and being born in the country of residence (i.e. Germany). In addition, the pilot phase of the German naturalization test yielded that a “migration history” explains substantial variance of the performance when testing political and societal knowledge, though language skills are also important (Greve et al., 2009). Interestingly, in that study political knowledge did not correlated significantly with gender, time spent in Germany or the age of the course participants.

Moreover, it is obvious that political competencies and political behaviour correlate with each other. However, it is difficult to examine the causal relationship, but there probably exists an interrelation between both, political competence and political action. Schools do also play an important role for young people to obtain political knowledge and skills (e.g. Amadeo et al., 2002; Davies et al. 2006; Hahn, 2010; Hoskins et al. 2011; Kahne, Crow & Lee 2013; Keating, Benton & Kerr, 2012; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Print, 2012; Saha & Print, 2010; Schulz et al. 2010; Torney-Purta et al. 2001; Zhang, Torney-Purta & Barber, 2010), and especially universities are arenas for political protest. Both may provide learning opportunities through civic, community and/or political activities in school or university which further support the development of political competencies. On the other hand, they also provide cognitive input which as a consequence might lead to civic and political participation.

Finally, media usage is also discussed to be important for political information (e.g. Horstmann, 1991; Print, Saha & Edwards, 2004; Valentino & Nardis, 2013) as reported in the previous section and may, thus, be considered a predictor of political knowledge, too. The mass media convey political information, but do not usually intend to educate their audience. The media in fact tends to focus on interesting and newsworthy current events, particularly negative incidents (e.g. Galtung & Ruge, 1965). These events are what figure in discussions in social media or reports by the mass media.

In conclusion, it may be suspected that the media plays an important role in informing the populace about current *events and facts*, whereas civic education classes and active participation in school, at university or in political realm may establish a deeper *understanding of politics* (see also Print, 2012; Reichert, 2010). Therefore, it is hypothesized that (1a) the media primarily influence symbolic political knowledge positively (which is also easier to achieve in cases when people only absorb political information by accident, e.g., when watching television or listening to the radio), while (1b) structural political knowledge is mainly achieved by active political participation. (1c) Participation at school or university

might also be positive for structural political knowledge, and differences between different kinds of participation may exist.

These hypotheses may even be specified: (1a) If we recall our theoretical considerations in the previous section, we may assume that broadsheets and public broadcasting are the most positive predictors among the mass media. Watching private television could even be without any positive effect on political knowledge. Based on the literature review, it is moreover reasonable to expect the Internet to have the strongest impact on knowledge gains across time, i.e. between measurements. Whether or not the Internet and perhaps weekly newsmagazines provide thorough information which also establishes structural political knowledge needs to be explored.

(1b) As Johann (2012) found that voting shares more common variance with what we call symbolic political knowledge, it may be assumed that voting increases symbolic political knowledge. On the other hand, the same author found common variance between participation that goes beyond voting and both types of political knowledge—though at least structural knowledge was more important than symbolic political knowledge with regard to party political participation. Hence, structural political knowledge should be more likely affected by conventional political action, whereas any other non-electoral political behaviour might be effective in influencing both kinds of political knowledge.

(1c) Even though the author is not aware of respective research on differential effects of participation at school and university when it comes to the prediction of symbolic versus structural political knowledge, it seems not unlikely that these kinds have stronger correlations with structural political knowledge than with symbolic knowledge. This vague hypothesis is justified by the fact that based on curricula, schools in particular intend to convey political knowledge, and apparently are more successful with respect to structural knowledge (Jennings 1996). However, there might as well be a chance to find the converse: whereas structural knowledge would be acquired through formal education at school, actually getting active could maybe support symbolic political knowledge.

In contrast to political knowledge, the analysis of political reasoning has apparently been somewhat unattended, so that predicting the effects of media exposure and political action on it is more ambiguous. Although the study of political reasoning will even be more explorative in nature because of the empirical research base, it is nevertheless suspected that (2) the ability of political reasoning might be equally influenced by both, media consumption and political participation. Certainly, third variables such as social background variables (e.g., “social capital”) and general cognitive skills or respectively age (as proxy for cognitive maturity) may be more important. Yet this second hypothesis is justified by the fact that the media depicts cases and events which may provide opportunities for critical analytical thinking,

while not necessarily promoting the acquisition of structural political knowledge.

3.2 Sample

In order to conduct the pilot study and to scrutinise those hypotheses, empirical evidence was conducted as subsidiary part of a larger project (cf. Reichert, 2013; Simon, Reichert & Grabow 2013; Simon et al. 2014) using a two-wave panel design. A first wave was conducted in March and April 2010. The sample consisted of 76 university students from the Department of Social Psychology and Political Psychology at the University of Kiel. At the department, every test subject filled in a paper-and-pencil-test answering the competence questions. Before that, all participants answered an online questionnaire about their past political activity and their intentions to engage in politics among other things. All questionnaires were written in German and all students got a special kind of credit which all of them need to complete their studies, so there should not be any motivation-based selection bias.

All participants held a German citizenship and had acquired their “Abitur” (i.e. their high-school diploma) in Germany. Students who did not fulfil these two essential criteria were excluded because the assessment referred to the German polity, i.e. knowledge that should be learned at German schools. The mean age of the respondents was 23 years ($SD = 3.60$), and most of the respondents were female (71%, one missing value). Furthermore, the families of 53% of them had lived in Germany for at least three generations (five missing values due to inconsistent information). The mean net income was around 525 Euro ($SD = 269$) per month and probably lower than the German average although variation is usually very high³.

Nine to ten months later, 41 participants of the first survey were surveyed again to get information about their political behaviour during that time and to re-measure their political knowledge. 35 students of the initial survey did not complete the second questionnaire which was provided online. Besides a few incorrect or even missing email addresses from the students, many just did not participate in the survey even though reminders were sent out. Moreover, all respondents were aware that ten of them would win 20 Euro in a raffle, and five of the quickest respondents could even win 50 Euro. Yet it is worth mentioning that there were no statistical differences in socio-demographics between the 35 students who had participated only in the first wave and the 41 panel participants, though a smaller proportion of the panel sample had participated in conventional political action before the first time of measurement compared to students who were only surveyed one time (10% vs. 29%; two-tailed $\alpha = .05$). The following section gives details about the measurement of the key variables.

3.3 Operationalization⁴

Measuring the criteria: Political competencies

In order to examine the relationships between political competencies and political media usage as well as immediate political behaviour, proper competence measures had to be used. For developing an adequate political knowledge test for university students, the works of Greve et al. (2009), Fend (1991), Ingrisich (1997), Krampen (1991; 2000), Price (1999), Schulz and Sibberns (2004), and Westle (2006) were consulted. Twelve mostly single choice items were used to measure structural political knowledge. Single choice items included three distractors and one correct answer, e.g. “What is not a responsibility of the German Bundestag?—Pass laws; assign the federal cabinet; check the government’s work; elect the German chancellor”; or “If there is a change in government in one of the German federal states, for the federal government governing becomes:—More difficult if the majority of the Bundestag changes unfavourably; easier if new governing parties get into the *Bundesrat*; easier if fewer opposition parties get into the Bundestag; more difficult if the majority in the *Bundesrat* changes unfavourably”. Two of the twelve items that measured structural political knowledge were open questions asking for the correct meaning of abbreviations such as “BVerfG” (the German Federal Constitutional Court).

Symbolic political knowledge was measured using two questions with unsorted/unassigned answers where all respondents had to match parties and their campaign promise(s), respectively (socio-)political organisations and corresponding representatives (e.g., matching Andrea Nahles and the Social Democratic Party to each other), which in sum made 13 matches. These two questions accordingly sum up to 13 binary items.

After data collection, every knowledge item was dichotomised⁵ (correct vs. incorrect answer)⁶ and a two-dimensional 2PL-Birnbaum model was modelled and tested (for more details see Reichert 2010). Though significantly correlated ($r = .67$, $p < .001$), this two-dimensional model proved to be adequate (Hu & Bentler 1999; Muthén, 2004). $\chi^2(274) = 278.89$ ($p = .407$), CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.15, WRMR = 0.796. Therefore, two weighted indexes for symbolic (from 0 to 9.742; $M = 6.41$, $SD = 2.76$, $\alpha = .86$) and structural political knowledge (from 0 to 5.892; $M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.33$, $\alpha = .67$) were constructed.

In addition to the factual knowledge items, the students were presented three open question formats to measure political reasoning, modelled on Andreas et al. (2006) and Massing and Schattschneider (2005). For instance, one question asked for the respondents’ opinion about direct political participation of citizens and a brief justification for their opinion using specific examples. Approximately one month after data collection, the answers were rated by two prospective teachers (male and female), and rerated four to six weeks later. All coder reliabilities were acceptable ($CR > .69$), but the index “political reasoning” ($\alpha = .73$) was,

however, dichotomised based on the median proportion of positive ratings due to outliers and its skew distribution ($M = 0.47$, $SD = 0.50$; the frequency refers to at least 67% positive ratings achieved according to the two raters).

As the second survey was only provided online so that the motivation to complete the entire questionnaire was harder to hold up during the test situation by the researchers, it was imperative to use a reduced number of test items. Of the panel participants, 40 students answered three items on structural knowledge in the second survey (i.e. one missing case). Two of these came from the first assessment, while the third was adopted from the German Longitudinal Election Study (e.g. Rattinger et al., 2011) asking about the importance of the votes in the German federal elections. All of them were single choice questions with three distractors and one correct answer. The index of symbolic knowledge contains six items comparable to the initial survey. In order to better deal with the small number of items and the small panel sample, panel indexes were dichotomised based on the median number of correct answers (structural knowledge: $M = 0.60$, $SD = 0.50$; symbolic knowledge: $M = 0.53$, $SD = 0.51$; frequencies refer to two or three correct answers and to six correct answers, respectively). Political reasoning could not be measured in the second survey.

Predictors (I): Political action and student participation

Due to the assumption that political competencies may differentially be affected by different kinds of political action, the students' participation in various political activities was measured according to the classification that was introduced earlier. All respondents stated whether they had voted in the German parliamentary election of 2009 (87% had) and if they had participated in conventional political activities (a dichotomised measure of the items: contacted a politician, actively supported a political party campaign, and membership in a political party; 18% had). They also indicated previous unconventional behaviour (a sum index with five items: signed a petition, distributed political leaflets, consumer boycott, participated in a legal demonstration, and participated in a citizens' initiative; $M = 1.82$, $SD = 1.31$) and whether they had participated in non-normative political protest (dichotomised measure of six items: wrote a political slogan on a public wall, participated in an illegal demonstration, blocked a road for political reasons, occupied houses or offices, participated in a violent demonstration, damaged other people's property; 25% had).

Additionally, the students were asked if they had been a member of the pupil representation ($M = 0.33$, $SD = 0.47$), class or vice-class president ($M = 0.66$, $SD = 0.48$), or if they had been engaged in a protest movement at their school ($M = 0.42$, $SD = 0.50$). Furthermore, they stated whether they had participated in elections to the student council ($M = 0.21$, $SD = 0.41$) or attended a student assembly at university ($M = 0.29$,

$SD = 0.46$). This retrospective information may allow assessing the long-term impact of participation in school as well as of activities in the current environment of the students at their university.

Information about political activities that the students engaged in between both measurements allows examining its effects on political knowledge even when controlling for initial levels of knowledge. Therefore, data about political behaviour between both surveys were also collected. In the second wave, conventional political activity was measured using four items (participation in a political committee or working group was additionally considered; 10%), but unconventional ($M = 1.54$, $SD = 1.31$) and non-normative political action (18%) were measured with the same items as in the first survey. Participants also indicated whether they had voted in political elections between the first and the second measurement (54%). However, only 13 students could answer this question because of missing opportunities to vote. Voting at time two will therefore be excluded from analyses.

Predictors (II): Political media consumption

In order to analyse the potential effects of media consumption on the acquisition of political competencies, all respondents indicated how often they follow politics in the German media (from 0 = *never* to 4 = *very often*), such as: public ($M = 1.99$, $SD = 1.05$) and private broadcasting ($M = 1.16$, $SD = 1.13$), radio ($M = 1.46$, $SD = 1.17$), tabloids ($M = 0.71$, $SD = 1.10$), broadsheets ($M = 1.14$, $SD = 1.27$), local dailies ($M = 1.12$, $SD = 1.14$), weekly newspapers and newsmagazines ($M = 1.47$, $SD = 1.34$), and the Internet ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.15$). Besides the mentioned variables, the four single items for the use of newspapers and both television items were combined to two respective indexes. For this purpose, the highest value (i.e. the maximum) of any newspaper item ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 1.23$) as well as of any television item ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 0.97$) was used as indicator which defined the value of the index for each person. This means that according to this measurement, for example, a student who never watched public but very often private broadcasting to gather political information would get the highest possible value of the television index (i.e. watch television very often for the purpose of gaining political information). Finally, the four single items for the use of newspapers and the two items for watching television were dichotomised (0 = *never/rarely* and 1 = *occasionally/often/very often*)—these will only be analysed as dichotomous variables due to their otherwise problematic distributions.

Further variables

Additionally, control variables were also included in the time one questionnaire. Political interest was measured using two items ($r = 0.83$, $p < .001$). "How interested are you in politics?" (from 0 = *not at all interested* to 4 = *very interested*) and "I am interested in politics." (from 0 = *not true at all* to 4 = *absolutely true*) In addition, several

socio-demographic variables were measured, such as gender, age, net income and whether a student had a migration history. Political efficacy will not be considered as it might be rather a consequence of political competence than a precursor, and because of the cross-sectional character of most of the data.

4 Results

4.1 Socio-demographic and control variables

As can be seen in table 1⁷, older participants show higher structural political knowledge at the second measurement than younger participants. Gender is constantly a significant correlate of both kinds of political knowledge, i.e. male participants have higher political knowledge. The income of study participants and whether or not a student has a migration history is not correlated with any of the competence variables. Older participants have also higher incomes (no table).

Political interest is at least moderately and significantly correlated with all competence variables (Table 1), and male respondents are more interested in politics compared to female respondents (no table).

Table 1: Bivariate correlations between political competencies and control variables

	Criteria at t_1			Criteria at t_2	
	Structural Knowledge	Symbolic Knowledge	Political Reasoning	Structural Knowledge	Symbolic Knowledge
Age	.07	.11	-.16	.42 [¶]	.22
Gender (female/male)	.31 [†]	.46 [‡]	.11	.34 [¶]	.34 [¶]
Income	.07	.14	.05	.29	-.02
Migration history (no/yes)	.03	-.02	.00	-.02	-.08
Political interest	.41 [‡]	.45 [‡]	.45 [‡]	.35 [¶]	.49 [‡]

Note: Significant correlations are denoted as follows:
‡: $p \leq .001$, †: $p \leq .01$, ¶: $p \leq .05$.

Considering the predictor variables of interest, significant correlations with socio-demographic and control variables will also be mentioned (two-tailed $\alpha = .05$; no table). Among the students that were surveyed, a migration history is positively correlated with watching political news on public television, and income correlates positively with participation in elections to the student council at university. Age has positive coefficients with respect to non-normative political participation before the first measurement and with participation in elections to the student council at university. Male students are more likely to follow political news in newspapers—particularly in broadsheets—and on the Internet. Furthermore, male respondents more often participate in conventional political activities, both before time one and between both measurements.

Political interest is positively correlated with several variables: using newspapers (except local papers), television (particularly public broadcasting) and the

Internet; political action (except non-normative behaviour); and every kind of participation at school and attendance of a student assembly at university. Hence, political interest and gender will be included as control variables in multiple analyses for the prediction of those criteria that were measured at time one⁸.

Regarding multiple analyses for criteria of the second measurement, however, it will only be controlled for the respective knowledge index from the first measurement. This means that it will only be controlled for symbolic knowledge measured at time one when predicting symbolic knowledge measured in the second survey; and it will only be controlled for structural knowledge measured at time one when predicting structural knowledge measured in the second survey, but neither gender nor political interest will be included. Due to the small sample size for the panel analyses, this seems to be the most appropriate way, as this implicates that *changes* in political knowledge will be explained while controlling for the “initial” level of knowledge.

4.2 Past political activity as a predictor of political competence

We will begin our analyses with political action as a potential cause of the political competencies of the study participants. By looking at Table 2 and cross-sectional correlations, one can see that structural political knowledge at time one is higher if respondents had participated in the 2009 election, in unconventional political action or in non-normative activities before the first survey, though sometimes only marginally significant coefficients emerge. Symbolic political knowledge and voting as well share a marginally significant, positive correlation. However, those students who engaged in conventional political action perform better in political reasoning.

Regarding the second measurement, we again find primarily positive correlations. Study participants who say that they engaged in conventional political action between both surveys more often answer all symbolic knowledge questions at time two correctly. This relationship is only marginally significant for structural political knowledge which we would have expected to be vice versa. Marginally significant correlations also exist between symbolic political knowledge at time two and conventional political participation before the first survey.

Although no other significant correlation indicates that political competence might be a consequence of political action among the study participants, coefficients for correlations between political competencies and political participation during both measurements give some indication that political competencies may more likely be causes of political action (compare also Reichert 2010 who modelled these competencies as predictors of political action). This suggestion is also backed by many significant correlations between political competence measured in the first survey and subsequent conventional and unconventional political behaviour which are

presented in shaded cells in table 2. Hence, empirical evidence suggests that here the effect of political action on political knowledge is less strong than vice versa so that in our study the causal relationship may be reversed in contrast to our expectation.

Table 2: Bivariate correlations between political competencies and political activities

		Criteria at t_1			Criteria at t_2	
		Structural Knowledge	Symbolic Knowledge	Political Reasoning	Structural Knowledge	Symbolic Knowledge
Predictors at t_1	Voting in general election (2009)	.24 [¶]	.20 [♦]	-.11	-.05	.12
	Conventional participation	.18	.14	.24 [¶]	.11	.31 [♦]
	Unconventional participation	.21 [♦]	.11	.17	.05	.10
	Non-normative participation	.19 [♦]	.14	.12	.05	.03
Predictors at t_2	Conventional participation	.37 [¶]	.33 [¶]	.37 [¶]	.27 [♦]	.32 [¶]
	Unconventional participation	.32 [¶]	.10	.25	.12	-.00
	Non-normative participation	.07	.11	.14	.11	-.09

Note: Significant correlations are denoted as follows:
[‡]: $p \leq .001$, [†]: $p \leq .01$, [¶]: $p \leq .05$, [♦]: $p \leq .10$.

In the following, several multiple linear regression analyses for knowledge indexes measured at time one are conducted. The procedure is as follows and will be repeated for subsequent regression analyses: Firstly, for each single potential predictor of political participation measured at time one, a separate model using only the predictor variable itself, i.e. the respective kind of political action, and the control variables gender and political interest is calculated for each of the two political knowledge indexes. This implicates that four “first models” are conducted for each of the criteria, each of the models controlling for gender and political interest: one for the predictor voting in the regression for structural political knowledge, one for the predictor conventional political action regarding structural knowledge, one for unconventional regarding structural knowledge and one for non-normative participation regarding structural knowledge; and the same four models are conducted regarding the criterion symbolic political knowledge. Interestingly, neither of the behavioural predictor variables yields significance. Political interest is always a positive predictor of the knowledge indexes ($\beta \geq .34$, $t \geq 2.69$, $p \leq .009$). Gender also yields significant coefficients with respect to symbolic political knowledge ($\beta \geq .32$, $t \geq 3.02$, $p \leq .004$), indicating that male respondents are more knowledgeable than female respondents. These patterns are confirmed in our second models when all four behavioural predictor variables and the two controls are included at once for each of the criteria. Hence, against our assumption neither way of

the respondents’ political behaviour does predict their political knowledge of any kind.

The same procedure applies to political reasoning using logistic regression analysis which is appropriate for dichotomous outcomes. In the first models which regress political reasoning on gender, political interest and each kind of political action in four separate analyses—one for each key predictor—, voting is a marginally significant, negative predictor of political reasoning ($OR = 0.22$, $Wald = 3.38$, $p = .066$). In contrast, political interest predicts higher chances in political reasoning ($OR = 3.60$, $Wald = 9.40$, $p = .002$; $R_{Nagelkerke} = .228$). Political interest is the only significant predictor in any of the other separately conducted analyses of model one ($OR \geq 2.05$, $Wald \geq 6.29$, $p \leq .012$). In model two we include all four behavioural predictors at once together with gender and political interest. As the mentioned patterns do not change, a third, economic and final model is conducted which only considers the predictor and control variables that previously were found to be significant in at least one of the models for political reasoning. Therefore, political interest ($OR = 2.66$, $Wald = 10.57$, $p = .001$) and voting ($OR = 0.21$, $Wald = 3.55$, $p = .060$) remain as sole predictors in the final model ($R_{Nagelkerke} = .231$). Thus we do find some evidence that political behaviour—namely voting—is relevant in the prediction of political reasoning.

When looking at the analyses for the criteria of the second survey, we always calculate only one model for each predictor which includes only two variables due to the small panel sample: These are one behavioural predictor variable and the political knowledge index measured at time one which corresponds to the respective knowledge criterion we want to predict at time two. For instance, if we want to predict the structural political knowledge of our respondents in the second survey by conventional political action between both surveys, we include the two predictors conventional action between both surveys as measured at time two and structural political knowledge measured in the first survey as baseline level of structural knowledge so to speak. However, none of the behavioural variables that were measured at time one is a significant predictor of knowledge at time two when controlling for the knowledge variables measured in the first survey in neither model, but the knowledge variables. The results for the political action predictors measured at time two are also not worth mentioning.

4.3 Participation in school and at university: predictors of political competence?

In the previous section, we found only scarce evidence that political behaviour is a proper predictor of political competence, so now we want to have a look at behaviour that is considered in civic education as well, but not particularly political in its character. It is often said that participation at school and as a student might facilitate civic and political competencies, so what do we find in our sample? –

Table 3 gives the bivariate correlations between political competencies and participation in school and at university. Respondents who formerly participated in a pupil representation at school score higher on structural political knowledge. Structural knowledge is also slightly higher for those respondents who were (vice-)class presidents at school or who participated in a school protest movement (marginally significant coefficients). However, among the study participants none of these three activities correlates significantly with any of the other political competence variables that were measured in this study. Thus, although we find a first hint for our hypothesis that participation at school increases structural political knowledge according to the cross-sectional correlations, we find no evidence for a significant long-term effect.

Table 3: Correlations between political competencies and participation in school/at university

		Criteria at t_1			Criteria at t_2	
		Structural Knowledge	Symbolic Knowledge	Political Reasoning	Structural Knowledge	Symbolic Knowledge
School	Member of pupil representation	.25 [¶]	.19	.18	-.15	-.04
	(Vice-)Class president	.20 [*]	.09	-.09	-.24	-.13
	Participation in school protest movement	.19 [*]	.18	.10	.21	.12
University	Participation in elections to student council	.21 [*]	.29 [¶]	.17	.33 [¶]	.39 [¶]
	Attendance of a student assembly	.14	.01	-.02	.10	-.05

Note: Significant correlations are denoted as follows:
‡: $p \leq .001$, †: $p \leq .01$, ¶: $p \leq .05$, ♦: $p \leq .10$.

However, somewhat surprisingly in this study students who participated in elections to the student council at university before the first survey took place consistently give more correct answers to the questions on political knowledge. This refers to both times of measurement, even though the correlation regarding structural political knowledge at time one is only marginally significant. The attendance of a student assembly is, however, uncorrelated with all competence variables among the respondents.

Again, for multiple analyses several models are calculated: The first models for criteria measured at time one include gender, political interest and always one of the key behavioural predictor variables, which makes three first models for each competence criterion when we look at the impact of participation at school. In the second models, all school participation variables are included together with gender and political interest. However, when controlling for gender and political interest, none of the school variables of interest is a significant predictor of political knowledge of any kind in

this sample. As already seen in previous analyses of this study, male gender is a positive predictor of symbolic political knowledge ($\beta \geq .34$, $t \geq 3.24$, $p \leq .002$), and political interest consistently is a significant and positive predictor of both knowledge indexes measured in the first survey ($\beta \geq .33$, $t \geq 2.83$, $p \leq .006$).

When these analyses are repeated for each participation variable at university, we get similar results. However, participation in elections to the student council increases symbolic political knowledge of the respondents. The final model thus contains participation in elections to the student council ($\beta = .21$, $t = 2.09$, $p = .040$), gender ($\beta = .32$, $t = 3.15$, $p = .002$) and political interest ($\beta = .31$, $t = 2.98$, $p = .004$) as relevant predictors of symbolic political knowledge ($R^2 = .355$).

With respect to political reasoning, the pattern for participation at school is quite interesting, while that one for participation at university is not worth mentioning. When calculating the previously mentioned first models separately for the criterion political reasoning, political interest appears as a significant and positive predictor ($OR \geq 2.14$, $Wald \geq 7.14$, $p \leq .008$). However, having been a president or vice-president of one's class in school ($OR = 0.38$, $Wald = 2.84$, $p = .092$) yields marginal significance ($R_{Nagelkerke} = .223$). If all school participation variables are included at the same time in the second model, this model is significant, as is also the variable member of the pupil representation. Thus, the final model includes only variables that were significant in one of the previously conducted models: the significant and positive predictor member of the pupil representation ($OR = 3.62$, $Wald = 3.91$, $p = .048$), the negative predictor (vice-)class president ($OR = 0.18$, $Wald = 5.92$, $p = .015$) as well as political interest ($OR = 2.63$, $Wald = 10.00$, $p = .002$), of course ($R_{Nagelkerke} = .286$). Participation at school indeed seems to have an effect on the respondents' ability of political reasoning, but only if we account for political interest.

In the analyses for the criteria of political knowledge measured in 2011, we predict each of the two knowledge indexes separately by each of the key predictor variables controlling only for structural political knowledge at time one if we want to predict structural knowledge at time two, and controlling for symbolic political knowledge as measured in the first survey when predicting symbolic political knowledge in 2011, respectively. We find that having been a (vice-)class president in school predicts low structural political knowledge in the long run (Table 4). The same is true for having been a member of the pupil representation at school. However, if both are included together in a final model, then only having been a (vice-)class president remains a marginally significant predictor of structural knowledge among our respondents. The same procedure with participation at university yields only significant coefficients for the control variable, political knowledge measured at time one. Again, the initial level of political knowledge is the best predictor of subsequent political knowledge.

Table 4: Logistic regression for structural political knowledge (t_2) on participation in school

	Structural Political Knowledge (t_2)					
	OR	Wald	OR	Wald	OR	Wald
Member of pupil "representation"	0.14 [¶]	4.14	–	–	0.27	1.61
(Vice-)Class president	–	–	0.11 [¶]	4.95	0.17 [♦]	2.72
Structural political knowledge (t_1)	2.92 [‡]	7.81	2.72 [‡]	7.99	3.24 [‡]	8.66
$R_{Nagelkerke}$.349		.381		.423	

Note: Significant Odds Ratios are denoted as follows:
‡: $p \leq .001$, †: $p \leq .01$, ¶: $p \leq .05$, ♦: $p \leq .10$.

4.4 Media consumption as a predictor of political competence

The media takes a special role in the prediction of political competence, because it can be used purposefully in classrooms as well as outside school. Political media consumption may at any rate be considered to be some sort of political participation. So do the media and the images it provides increase rather symbolic than structural political knowledge? Is there a substantial difference among broadsheets and tabloids or between public versus private broadcasting?—In the present study, the use of newspapers and the Internet correlate positively with both knowledge indexes at time one, though only marginally for structural knowledge and newspapers (Table 5). A closer look reveals that significant results for newspapers at time one are probably due to the aggregation of single items on reading newspapers for the purpose of political information. One exemption is political reasoning, which is higher for respondents who read broadsheet as well as weekly newspapers.

Except a significant and positive correlation between symbolic knowledge and newspapers, which probably arises from the use of tabloids, as well as a marginally significant and negative correlation between structural knowledge and television, which is due to watching private broadcasting, none of the indexes of media consumption yields a significant correlation with any of the political knowledge indexes at time two. However, the correlation for reading tabloids with symbolic political knowledge, already of moderate strength at the first measurement, gains significance at time two.

Table 5: Bivariate correlations between political competencies and media consumption

	Criteria at t_1			Criteria at t_2	
	Structural Knowledge	Symbolic Knowledge	Political Reasoning	Structural Knowledge	Symbolic Knowledge
Newspapers	.20 [♦]	.29 [¶]	.22	–.16	.39 [¶]
Tabloids	–.07	–.00	.33	–.17	.52 [¶]
Broadsheets	.02	.18	.44 [‡]	.28	.28
Local dailies	.08	.01	–.26	–.15	.08
Weeklies	.14	.12	.29 [♦]	–.10	.30
Television	–.02	.03	.00	–.35 [♦]	–.21
Public broadcasting	.01	.20 [♦]	–.08	–.08	.15
Private broadcasting	–.31 [‡]	–.44 [‡]	–.06	–.62 [‡]	–.31
Radio	–.03	–.08	.23 [♦]	.14	–.27
Internet	.33 [‡]	.34 [‡]	.20	.21	.01

Note: Significant correlations are denoted as follows:
‡: $p \leq .001$, †: $p \leq .01$, ¶: $p \leq .05$, ♦: $p \leq .10$.

The present insignificance of watching television—except the already mentioned marginally significant, negative correlation with structural knowledge at time two—is apparently caused by putting together public and private broadcasting: for the students under investigation, both variables tend to have converse algebraic signs. Among the respondents, consuming political information via private broadcasting obviously results in less political knowledge of any kind. For structural political knowledge, this relation even holds in the panel analysis. Public broadcasting seems to be without an effect on the political competencies of the study participants, though a trend exists according to which those respondents who watch political news on public television perform better regarding symbolic political knowledge.

In sum, yet there is only marginal evidence that the respondents' symbolic political knowledge but not their structural knowledge is affected by the mass media. Correlations with specific types of newspapers do not yet really support our assumption either, even though we find differences between tabloids and broadsheets as well as between public versus private broadcasting that to some extent can be reinterpreted in favour of the hypothesis in that private broadcasting is negative for political knowledge.

Multiple regression analyses yield similar results to those conducted in the previous sections. The first models include three predictor variables: gender, political interest and for each political knowledge variable measured in 2010 as a criterion also one key predictor, i.e. one model also includes the use of newspapers, another model the use of television, one the radio and the last model one accounts for the Internet. All models only result in the consistent positive significance of political interest ($\beta_s \geq .33$, $t_s \geq 2.58$, $p_s \leq .012$), as well as in higher symbolic political knowledge among male respondents ($\beta_s \geq .31$, $t_s \geq 2.97$,

$p \leq .004$). The second models regress the respective knowledge indexes on all four media variables, gender and political interest, but the mentioned pattern does not change.

When looking at the *indicators* of reading political newspapers (tabloids, broadsheets, local dailies, weeklies) which are all included at the same time in an additional analysis controlling for gender and political interest, no interesting result appears in the cross-sectional analyses for time one. However, when political knowledge is regressed on both *indicators* of television and the two control variables, we find that watching political news on private television significantly decreases the political knowledge of the study participants, and primarily symbolic political knowledge (Table 6).

Table 6: Linear regression for political knowledge (t_1) on television

	Structural Political Knowledge		Symbolic Political Knowledge	
	β	t	β	t
Public broadcasting	-.13	-1.24	.07	0.78
Private broadcasting	-.21 [♦]	-1.98	-.31 [†]	-3.34
Political interest	.39 [‡]	3.39	.31 [‡]	3.07
Gender (female/male)	.13	1.17	.28 [‡]	2.84
R^2	.275		.429	

Note: Standardised coefficients; significant coefficients are denoted as follows: [‡]: $p \leq .001$, [†]: $p \leq .01$, [¶]: $p \leq .05$, [♦]: $p \leq .10$.

Neither index variable in any of the models conducted in the same vein as above is able to predict the political reasoning of the students that were surveyed, except political interest ($OR \geq 1.97$, $Wald \geq 5.61$, $p \leq .018$). However, by looking at the four *indicators* of reading newspapers which are again altogether introduced in an additional model, it appears that local newspapers as well as broadsheets are significant predictors of political reasoning among respondents, even if the control variables gender and political interest are included. When excluding all insignificant predictors from this model, local dailies still predict a low ability of political reasoning ($OR = 0.27$, $Wald = 4.79$, $p = .029$), while those respondents who read broadsheets tend to gain a higher ability of political reasoning ($OR = 3.12$, $Wald = 3.74$, $p = .053$). Political interest predicts a high ability of political reasoning of the study participants ($OR = 2.11$, $Wald = 6.37$, $p = .012$; $R_{Nagelkerke} = .279$). Hence, broadsheets that are meant to be more thorough in their reports increase political reasoning, which we would perhaps have expected, even though the negative effect of local daily newspapers is insofar surprising as we do not find a similar result for tabloids which we might expect to be more superficial than local dailies.

With respect to political knowledge measured at time two, only one analysis is worth mentioning: respondents

who watch political news on private broadcastings ($OR = 0.21$, $Wald = 3.84$, $p < .050$) have lower structural political knowledge, while structural knowledge from time one ($OR = 1.80$, $Wald = 3.56$, $p = .059$) tends to yield higher political knowledge across time. Public broadcasting does not have an effect on the respondents' knowledge ($OR = 0.66$, $Wald = 0.24$, $p = .621$) ($R_{Nagelkerke} = .328$). This result is at least somewhat congruent with our assumption that political knowledge would not be improved by the use of private television.

4.5 Comparative summary

In summary, it seems that political action is more likely to be a consequence rather than a precursor of political competencies among the study participants. In the present sample, voting correlates with structural political knowledge, and conventional political action correlates with symbolic political knowledge in the second survey. There is, however, no indication that political action increases levels of political knowledge among respondents when accounting for control variables, which is not in support of our hypothesis.

Although having been a member of the pupil representation correlates positively with structural political knowledge in the first survey, together with the variable (vice-)class president it apparently reduces the structural political knowledge of the students that were surveyed in the long run. This is surprising since we expected the reverse pattern, i.e. we assumed schools to facilitate structural political knowledge. Although we already mentioned that formal learning in the classroom and active behaviour might have differential effects on variants of political knowledge. Participation in the elections to the student council at university increases the symbolic political knowledge of the respondents, but not their structural knowledge if we control for other variables.

With regard to the media consumption of the respondents, it is clear that watching political news on private broadcasting yields lower levels of political knowledge, particularly symbolic knowledge. We would not have expected that, though we also find a decrease in structural political knowledge in the long run. Significant bivariate correlations between the use of the Internet and both knowledge indexes at time one, as well as between reading newspapers (overall index) and symbolic knowledge in the first survey do not withstand if controls are considered.

As a consequence of these results, comparative analyses are conducted for symbolic political knowledge at time one in which symbolic knowledge is modelled on all variables that yielded significant regression coefficients in any of the analyses presented in the previous sections. These further analyses emphasize the importance of private broadcasting for reducing the symbolic knowledge of the study participants. As only watching private television remains a significant key predictor ($\beta = -.32$, $t = -3.38$, $p = .001$) when gender ($\beta = .27$,

$t = 2.80, p = .007$) and political interest ($\beta = .33, t = 3.41, p = .001$) are included into the analysis, the final model exists of three predictors ($R^2 = .424$).

The same applies to structural political knowledge. The final model includes the use of private broadcasting for political information ($\beta = -.24, t = -2.26, p = .027$) and political interest ($\beta = .38, t = 3.66, p < .001$) as significant predictors ($R^2 = .237$). No comparative analysis is conducted for the knowledge indexes of the second survey.

With regard to the political reasoning of the respondents, we have found that having voted and having been a (vice-)class president in school have negative effects, while former members of the pupil representation show a high ability of political reasoning. The role of their past conventional political participation is also positive, but not when controlling for other variables. Reading broadsheets also yields a higher level of political reasoning among the students surveyed, while reading local newspapers tends to affect this ability negatively.

Table 7: Overall logistic regression for political reasoning (t_1)

	Model I		Model II		Model III	
	OR	Wald	OR	Wald	OR	Wald
Voting in general election (2009)	0.75	0.12	0.39	0.96		
Conventional participation	5.33 [¶]	4.75	3.19	2.18		
Member of pupil "representation"	5.38 [¶]	4.88	4.68 [¶]	4.03	4.08 [♦]	3.80
(Vice-)Class president	0.17 [¶]	5.51	0.15 [¶]	5.49	0.15 [¶]	6.28
Broadsheets	5.06 [†]	7.10	3.45 [♦]	3.68	3.28 [♦]	3.45
Local dailies	0.36 [♦]	2.70	0.31 [♦]	3.13	0.31 [♦]	3.52
Political interest			2.20 [¶]	4.58	2.73 [¶]	6.27
$R_{Nagelkerke}$.359		.424		.490	

Note: Standardised coefficients; significant coefficients are denoted as follows: [‡]: $p \leq .001$, [†]: $p \leq .01$, [¶]: $p \leq .05$, [♦]: $p \leq .10$.

Hence, all these variables are included in an overall first model which aims to compare the effects of the just mentioned variables, in which only voting is not at least a marginally significant predictor of political reasoning (Table 7). In a second model, it is also accounted for political interest as this has consistently proven to be significant in the prediction of political reasoning. As a consequence, neither voting nor conventional political action are significantly related to the criterion. Therefore, both variables are excluded in a third and final model. This shows that political interest increases chances for higher political reasoning of the respondents. Two more variables are positive predictors of their ability

of political reasoning, though only with marginal significance: member of the pupil representation at school as well as reading political news in broadsheets. Having been either class or vice-class president at school reduces chances for high political reasoning among the respondents when controlling for other variables, as well as reading local newspapers does at the significance level $\alpha = .10$. This again supports the previously reported interpretation that *political* behaviour is probably rather a consequence of political competence than vice versa.

5 Discussion and outlook

This paper aimed to analyse the influence of political participation in a wider understanding, i.e. including political media consumption and past activities at school and university, on different kinds of political knowledge and on political reasoning. The study reported here seeks to be a pilot study to identify variables that should be considered in future civic education research and wants to explore possible correlations between the just mentioned key variables. This comprises the question whether the media or active political participation are more important in the prediction of political knowledge and of the ability of political reasoning. Which requirements and challenges for subsequent studies have been identified? – Now let us have a look at how the results relate to the hypotheses of this study first.

5.1 Interpretation with reference to the hypotheses

We assumed that primarily structural political knowledge would be achieved by active political participation (1b). Specifically, it was assumed that voting increases symbolic political knowledge whereas structural knowledge might be more important with regard to party political participation. There were no specific assumptions related to the ability of political reasoning, although this competence was hypothesized to be equally influenced by both, media consumption and political participation (2). However, the findings indicate that at least political participation does not affect political knowledge and political reasoning among the study participants when we control for political interest. Although voting and structural political knowledge correlate significantly, as conventional political action correlates with political reasoning and symbolic political knowledge—exactly the opposite of our expectation—, it is more likely that these political competencies motivate the political participation of the respondents, in particular conventional action. Part of our first hypothesis (1b), thus, could not be validated. Future research should focus on the prediction of specific kinds of political action by political knowledge and examine the long-term relationship between both kinds of political knowledge and the four kinds of political action: maybe voting behaviour is predicted by symbolic political knowledge but increases structural knowledge afterwards, and conventional participation can be explained by structural political knowledge though improving the level of symbolic knowledge?

It was also expected that participation at school or university might be positive for structural political knowledge (1c). This was justified by the role schools play in formal civic education, but there was also a plausible justification for the counterhypothesis that structural knowledge would primarily be acquired through school lessons, whereas actually getting active could support symbolic political knowledge. What we find is, firstly, that participation in school and at university seems to influence the political competencies of the students under investigation. At least bivariate analyses support the hypothesis that participation in school is positive for structural political knowledge. Conversely, having been a (vice-)class president at school predicts a low level of structural political knowledge in the second survey. This might be the case because these students started on a higher level of structural knowledge, but they are forgetting things about political structures so that their level of knowledge will become more equal to that of people who had not been a (vice-)class president in school. Participation in elections to the student council at university is positively related with both knowledge indexes in this study, though it does not predict increases in the second survey.

Since it is easier to achieve symbolic political knowledge by just absorbing political information by accident, e.g., when watching television or listening to the radio, we also assumed the media primarily to influence symbolic political knowledge positively (1a). In particular, we expected that broadsheets and public broadcasting would be the most positive predictors among the mass media, while we were not certain if watching private television might even be without any positive effect on political knowledge. The Internet was hypothesized to have the strongest impact on knowledge gains between both surveys.

Although this hypothesis is falsified in many instances, we nevertheless find some indication for it. In bivariate analyses, the symbolic political knowledge of the respondents is positively and significantly correlated with newspaper consumption, watching political news on public broadcasting and using the Internet. However, the Internet is also significantly and positively correlated with their structural political knowledge. A somewhat unexpected finding is, however, the negative effect of private broadcasting on the students' political knowledge, even though we were ready to find zero effect. This is the only type of media consumption which stays significant in multiple analyses; and especially the finding that watching political news on commercial television reduces the chances of the respondents for gaining much structural political knowledge over time when we control for other variables is staggering. This might be interpreted in terms of the hypothesis only in that the negative effect persists merely with regard to the structural political knowledge of the respondents. Hence, those students who watch less political news on commercial television have better chances to gain higher structural political knowledge.

These are important findings as they may hint at media which could possibly be used efficiently in civics classes at school. Although our evidence is not yet conclusive, civics teachers may probably be advised carefully to choose the media they want to use for educational purposes in their classes. We must not conclude that every program on screen is "good" versus "bad" for educational purposes if it is a public versus private broadcasting program, and we may expect that teachers do always select the media they use at school very carefully. They might nevertheless be more thoughtful if they want to show programs coming from commercial television, and they would perhaps decide in favour of broadsheets compared to other newspapers (but see also below), though the teacher's didactical skills and efforts may in any case be more important than the distinction between one specific medium versus another. Finally, the Internet seems to provide a potential for facilitating political competencies, but here more research about the specific methods of usage that may help establishing those skills is needed and probably proper strategies for adequate uses of the Internet in support of political competencies need to be developed.

The second hypothesis is not fully falsified. Although it was less precise in its prediction, there is in fact rather supporting evidence for it. While political action is more likely to be a consequence of the respondents' political reasoning, multiple analyses show that participation as a pupil in school affects their reasoning ability. Whereas study participants who had been (vice-)class president in school have a lower ability of political reasoning, those who were a member of the pupil representation tend to achieve a higher ability. It is possible that those activities facilitate political reasoning skills due to a higher need to justify one's position reasonably in a pupil representation.

Furthermore, respondents who read broadsheets are more likely to achieve a high level of political reasoning, whereas readers of local daily newspapers tend to underperform with respect to political reasoning in this study. These findings hold even when controlling for political interest. The first we would probably ascribe to potentially thorough analyses and possibly more balanced discussions of politics that students can find in broadsheets. The negative effect of local newspapers is surprising, but could perhaps be attributed to the fact that those papers may be more likely to report about local events and local politics, of which the latter was not appropriately measured in the present study. Students' focus on their local environment and the consumption of local newspapers might lead to proper knowledge about local politics and, thus, be underestimated in this study. It is also worth mentioning that political reasoning is the only criterion which does not at least marginally significantly correlate with the Internet usage of the respondents, but marginally significant and positive bivariate correlations exist between political reasoning and two other media, i.e. the consumption of political news via radio and by reading weekly newspapers and/or weekly

newsmagazines. In any case, results are more balanced for the political reasoning of the surveyed people compared with their political knowledge. Hence, we may conclude that the second hypothesis is supported and that it is important to measure student participation and their media consumption.

5.2 Limitations

Besides these interpretations, there are some constraints which need to be considered when assessing the significance of our pilot study. First of all, not all hypotheses were affirmed. A reason for this could emerge from third variables which apparently are more important than those considered in this study. These third variables might, for instance, include familial socialization, social relationships and networks as well as general cognitive skills. Political interest is a significant and positive predictor of any political competence, and male gender also affects the symbolic political knowledge of the respondents positively. This in conjunction with the relatively small sample makes it hard for bivariate correlations—which we do in fact find—to persist. It is reasonable to assume that political interest might be a precondition for political action as well as political media consumption if we consider the literature on increasing political knowledge gaps caused by differential media usage (e.g., Gibson & McAllister, 2011; Wei & Hindman, 2011). Therefore, it is not surprising that significant bivariate relationships do not often persist in multiple analyses. The more meaningful are predictors that we found to be important even under control of political interest given the rather weak statistical power.

One constraint of the present study certainly is the small sample, particularly the small panel sample. As a consequence, some variables had to be dichotomised due to non-normal distributions. Dichotomisation might, however, yield other constrictions. In bivariate analyses, the application of adequate correlation techniques helped to deal with this limitation, and appropriate multiple techniques were applied, too. A larger sample with normally distributed variables that do not need dichotomisation would nevertheless be an improvement in future research. In particular with regard to panel analyses, a larger sample would also enable us to evaluate the net effect of political participation on political knowledge. This would also help to disentangle the mentioned spiral effect, where for instance symbolic political knowledge might increase the likelihood that people cast a ballot in a political election and in turn does affect their structural political knowledge indirectly, which then might increase the likelihood that they participate in conventional political action and so on. Moreover, a larger sample could cover a more diverse group of study participants instead of surveying only university students.

Another restriction probably comes directly from the measurement of media consumption. Instead of asking for “verbal” categories, future research will use “numeric” categories that allow not only for better

interpretations of responses, but also for a theoretically (and empirically) driven aggregation of categories. For example, it could be asked for the amount someone spends on watching news on television per day, or we might ask about how many days in a week people read about politics in newspapers. This will probably ease dealing with problematic distributions.

5.3 Outlook and conclusion

The current study aimed to get insights in possible relationships between political competencies, especially political knowledge, and its possible precursors political action and political media consumption. It shows that longitudinal studies are important to examine the causal relationship between political competence and political behaviour and that it might be helpful to distinguish between differential effects of different kinds of political behaviour in the prediction of structural and symbolic political knowledge. In addition, it also suggests that future research should be aware that media are diverse, even television or newspapers may require differentiated consideration: public television can yield different effects than private broadcasting, and tabloids might not have the same importance for political knowledge as broadsheets do. Consequently, our first conclusion would be that we should precisely measure in which ways people participate in political action and which media outlets they use. Moreover, we might even think of asking respondents if they actively seek political information or if they just consumed political information by accident and without intention to do so. Our results also indicate that at least with regard to political reasoning versus political knowledge, we will probably find differential effects of various predictor variables. As we found somewhat unexpected correlations between voting and structural political knowledge on the one hand, and between conventional participation and symbolic knowledge on the other hand, it is also reasonable trying better to understand the relationships between different facets of political knowledge and political activities and their interplay. This is a question which needs to be answered.

The author’s future research will, of course, rely on a larger sample, but the measurement of the extent of political media consumption will be modified as well. This particularly concerns the value labels used for measuring the frequency of media usage. Asking for the amount someone spends on consuming political news or how many days in a week people read or watch about politics is apparently much more meaningful than only asking for verbal responses such as “often”, “very often” etc. It is furthermore necessary to extend this research to a more comprehensive or at least different population. Here we were interested in the effects on highly educated people which may explain some unexpected findings; but will these results hold if we include people who do not go to university? This is by no means unlikely as education usually increases the likelihood of a person to be politically active and which also means these

people achieve higher levels of political knowledge (e.g., Galston, 2001; Mayer, 2011).

Recalling the rather insignificant role of the radio as a source of political knowledge in our study, we may even address another recent measurement issue: Symbolic political knowledge can probably be measured using facial recognition techniques where respondents are shown pictures of politicians and have to state their names (e.g., Wiegand, 2013). This would also be possible with campaign slogans or campaign posters and perhaps improve the measurement of symbolic knowledge considerably, not to speak of the variation in survey format which may be a welcome diversion for study participants when completing a questionnaire.

Eventually, we must not conclude that every television program is “good” for educational purposes if it is on public broadcasting, or “bad” for political education if it is on private television. We sure can expect that teachers do always select the media they use in their classes well-thought-out. In general, they might prefer some media against others, but in the classroom their didactical skills and efforts are probably more important than the mere distinction between specific types of media. We also found the Internet to have a potential for facilitating political competencies, but here more research and the development of proper strategies for adequate uses of the Internet in support of political competencies are needed.

To sum up this study, political action is probably rather a consequence than a condition of political competencies, though the interplay between various political activities, symbolic as well as structural knowledge need to be disentangled in a larger longitudinally designed study. Active involvement in school and participation at university are important in the prediction of political competencies—particularly pupil representations, student parliaments etc. seem to be helpful in order to raise profound political competencies. These effects may decline the more time passes since students have left school, but the retrospective information about past participation at school needs to be considered. Schools do not only convey political knowledge in civics lessons, they also help facilitating political competence by supporting student participation. As every democratic society needs a politically competent and engaged citizenry, further research needs to determine how the provision of political action opportunities can also help to raise the levels of political knowledge and reasoning.

The mass media do also play a role in the acquisition of political competencies, but we need carefully to decide how we want to measure the frequency or amount of political media consumption. Moreover, it comes without surprise that the kind of media and the medium have to be considered. Apparently, commercial broadcasting might inhibit political knowledge acquisition; newspapers are still very likely to be important factors in the acquirement of political competencies; radio may perhaps be disregarded—even though it is not just music—and, thus, allow the use of new formats to measure

political knowledge; and the Internet needs further attention. There is much more to consider when analysing media impacts in the future and finding methods how to reduce political knowledge gaps. Here the Internet is particularly important as it provides a mixture of all other media and allows people easily to *get active*: TV as well as radio recordings; online releases of the print versions of newspapers; online news-magazines; websites of politicians, political parties and institutions; interactive blogs; and even more.

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Endnotes

- ¹ This concept refers back to the label "surveillance facts" introduced by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1991) which is based on the observation that "ongoing events and new political developments [...] are more changeable and require monitoring, especially through the use of mass media and personal interaction" (Jennings 1996, p. 229).
- ² Adding to that, the patterns for answers that are wrong, correct, or unknown vary depending on gender (e.g., Vetter/Maier 2005; Westle 2005; 2013). Furthermore, compared to men, women are less knowledgeable with regard to "conventional" political knowledge, but they gain better results than men in the policy dimension (Stolle/Gidengil 2010).
- ³ According to the 19th Social Survey of the *Deutsche Studentenwerk*, the nominal average gross income of students in Germany in 2009 was 812 Euro per month (Isserstedt et al. 2010, 191) of which health insurance, taxes and social costs needed to be deducted to calculate the monthly net income.
- ⁴ A list of all items (in German) can be obtained from the author.
- ⁵ Dichotomous items were coded "0" for incorrect or "No" answers, and "1" for correct or "Yes" answers, respectively, throughout this paper.
- ⁶ Although correct knowledge, wrong knowledge and missing knowledge ("don't know" or leaving the question out) are different aspects (e.g. Johann 2008; Mondak 1999), missing values were treated as wrong answers. This is in line with the usual definition of knowledge which includes that one has to believe that one's own answer is correct, and with the finding that answering "don't know" indeed seems to indicate missing knowledge (e.g. Luskin/Bullock 2005).
- ⁷ Correlations are always reported with respect to the level of measurement: Pearson correlations refer to two variables that are both measured at (quasi) interval level. A point biserial correlation includes a (quasi) interval scaled variable and a truly dichotomous variable. A biserial correlation reports the covariation between a (quasi) interval variable and a variable that was not measured as a binary variable but was artificially dichotomised by the researcher after data collection. A tetrachoric correlation shows the covariation

between two artificially dichotomised variables, and the covariation between an artificially dichotomous variable and a truly dichotomous variable which was measured as a binary variable makes a point tetrachoric correlation.

- ⁸ Although some other socio-demographic variables do as well correlate with some of the criteria and predictor variables, the reported results hold even if these variables are added to analyses in which bivariate intercorrelations between them and other predictors or criteria exist, but without the added variables having any significant effect on any of the criteria. They are therefore not considered in the following models.

Erik Andersson, Maria Olson

Political Participation as Public Pedagogy – The Educational Situation in Young People’s Political Conversations in Social Media

In this article we argue that young people’s political participation in the social media can be considered ‘public pedagogy’. The argument builds on a previous empirical analysis of a Swedish net community called Black Heart. Theoretically, the article is based on a particular notion of public pedagogy, education and Hannah Arendt’s expressive agonism. The political participation that takes place in the net community builds up an educational situation that involves central characteristics: communication, community building, a strong content focus and content production, argumentation and rule following. These characteristics pave the way for young people’s public voicing, experiencing, preferences and political interests that guide their everyday political life and learning – a phenomenon that we understand as a form of public pedagogy.

Keywords:

education, public pedagogy, social media, young people, political participation, agonism, net community

1 Introduction

In this article we want to highlight the political and educational potential of young people who communicate through social media. When young people participate in the *social media*—digitally constituted media that build on the participants’ shared content and meaning creation and consumption—it can be argued that potential spaces for different kinds of political participation are being constituted. These potential spaces, we think, create *educational situations*, that is, events in specific contexts that are made by and carried forward by the communication of its participants, influencing and shaping them in specific directions. In these situations, young people can be politically socialised in directions that both support and antagonise a democratic society. What we wish to stress is that these kinds of situations can be understood as *public pedagogy*, that is, as various practices, processes and situations and spaces of learning and socialisation that occur both within and beyond the realm of formal educational institutions (Sandlin et al. 2011). So far, this kind of research has been meagrely investigated in the field of education, which is the underlying motive for highlighting this concern.

Contemporary Western society is highly structured by information and communication technology and changes in social life. These changes, according to Manuel Castells (2009), are just as dramatic as the changes in technology

and the economy. Cultural dissemination, individualism and the erosion of traditional institutions and the network character of the society can be seen as contributing to a new type of political situation (Dahlgren, 2009). In this situation, social media provide a possibility for people to take part in the public debate and also to be informally educated. According to previous research, this situation has increased the possibility to navigate and reshape social life as manifested in an increased use of social media (Drotner, 2008; Bakardjieva, 2009; Andersson, 2013).

Knowledge about young people’s political participation (or civic and political engagement, civic activism and the like), including the social media as a site for (will-based) education, makes it possible to examine and discuss one of many educational challenges in contemporary society—namely, the conditions and possibilities for young people to act as political persons (Andersson, 2012, 2013; Olson, 2012a, 2012b). Even though it is argued by several advocates that the increased use of the social media is of important educational value in this respect, little research has been carried out when it comes to considering the educational values and implications of social media in formal and informal settings (cf. Davies et al. 2012) and not least when it comes to stressing the relationship between political participation, social media and education. As Reid (2010) has put it: “Social media are a part of our pedagogical experience from conventional classroom to the many sites of public pedagogy, even if we have a limited understanding or even awareness of these emerging technologies at work around us” (p. 199). Further, according to Giroux (2003, p. 12), when it comes to the realm of education, “educational work needs to respond to the dilemmas of the outside world by focusing on how young people make sense of their experiences and possibilities for

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decision-making within the structures of everyday life". This requires that educators

address the practical consequences of their work in the broader society while simultaneously making connections to those too often ignored institutional forms, social practices, and cultural spheres that powerfully influence young people outside of schools, especially within the on-going and constantly changing landscape of popular culture with its shift away from a culture of print to an electronic, digitally constructed culture of images and high-speed hyper-texts. (Giroux, 2003, p. 12)

Utilising earlier research, *the aim* of this article is to theoretically describe and empirically illustrate young people's political participation in the social media as public pedagogy that is created by young people themselves and that can be understood as an educational situation. This is done by utilising empirical findings from Black Heart, a Swedish net community that, according to the institution itself, addresses young people in the ages of 14 to 28. A *net community* is a digital space constituted by social infrastructures, specific rules and norms built in communication between active participants. Black Heart is the fictitious name of the net community corresponding to the 'black' look of the institution and the music and fashion style of its original members. The communicative participation in Black Heart that has been analysed concerns controversial political conversations on topics such as global warming, meat consumption, homosexuality, abortion, religion, politically extremist parties in school, energy consumption and so on. In other words, conversations on issues that deeply divide a society, generating conflicting explanations, interests, perspectives and solutions based on alternative value systems that in the current situation will never reach consensus, thus showing that the situation of human togetherness is political (cf. Harwood & Hahn, 1990; Hand, 2008, 2007; Hess, 2009, 2004; Andersson, 2013). In order to meet the aim of the article – to theoretically describe and empirically illustrate young people's political participation in the social media as form of public pedagogy – the following question has served as our guide: *What kind of educational situation is generated in young people's political participation¹ in a net community created by and for young people?*

In the sections to come, we first provide a background to the concept of education and public pedagogy. Secondly, we present research in the field of political participation and public pedagogy in the social media. Thirdly, the theoretical framework is presented, followed by fourthly, a description of the method. Fifthly, the empirical findings in Black Heart are presented and finally, we make a case for social media as a site for public pedagogy.

2 Background: Education and public pedagogy

There are several ways to define education. Education could, in a radical theoretical perspective, be understood as a realisation and liberation of human potential; as a tool to incorporate newcomers into a prevailing order; as the production of the rational, autonomous individual; as the socialisation of democratic citizens; as the production of customers and labour workers and so on. Without claiming to give the correct and complete definition of education (it does not exist), we understand *education* to be essentially a social system – a common societal concern based on certain values and assumptions about life in the community aiming at the conservation and renewal of the world. Education is a public and community concern dealing with the relationships between those living in the community; it deals with questions of how each individual's new beginning could take place when considering that each individual is an *initium* – a new beginner (Biesta, 2006, p. 20). Or, in other words, the human being is a beginning, which makes it possible for her/him to begin (Arendt, 1954/2004, p. 182). In tandem with this theoretical framework, the foundation of all education is natality, the 'fact' that humans are born into the world (Arendt, 1954/2004, p. 188). This implies that education can be seen as a place filled with social, interpersonal and intrapersonal processes and situations that may allow the birth of something new in the world – a space for new beginners and beginners – and a vital force in the mutual project of life. Consequently, education may be depicted as a public concern and a vital node in the phenomenon called public pedagogy.

Public pedagogy denotes a research field that is still underdeveloped empirically and theoretically. Public pedagogy could, according to Sandlin and others (2011), be defined as:

various forms, processes, and sites of education and learning that occur beyond the realm of formal educational institutions – including popular culture ... informal educational institutions and public spaces ... dominant discourses ... and public intellectualism and social activism. (p. 4)

Public pedagogy, according to Biesta, is concerned with educational activity in extra institutional spaces: "the political and the educational dimension come together in the idea of 'public pedagogy'" (2012, p. 684). Public pedagogy focuses on "various forms, processes, and sites of education beyond formal schooling" (Sandlin et al. 2011, p. 338-339). It involves learning in public institutions such as museums, zoos and libraries, popular culture, media, commercial spaces, the Internet, figures and sites of activism, public intellectuals and grassroots social movements and so on. Consequently, public pedagogy concerns "spaces, sites, and languages of education and learning that exist outside of the walls of the institution of schools" (Sandlin et al. 2010 p. 1) and the "inquiry into the relationships among pedagogy,



democracy, and social action – regardless of where these relationships occur” (Sandlin et al., 2010, p. 4). Public pedagogy, as a concept, appeared as early as 1894 and “in some ways the general axiological import remains consistent – the term in its earliest usage implied a form of educational discourse in the service of the public good” (Sandlin et al., 2011, p. 341-342). This “locates pedagogy within the act of public speech itself” (p. 342). The term public refers, in this perspective, to an idealised outcome of educational activity; “the production of a public aligned in terms of values and collective identity” (p. 342).

With these points of departure in the research field of public pedagogy and in education, the concept of public pedagogy denotes an event. That is, public pedagogy is seen as a concern for “the public quality of human togetherness and thus for the possibility of actors and events to *become public*” (Biesta, 2012, p. 693). The theoretical underpinnings used in understanding and defining public pedagogy as an event of becoming public is grounded in the work of Hannah Arendt. To become public means, in Arendtian terms, a possibility for action in which freedom can appear, a creation of the public sphere: “In this interpretation the educational agent – the public pedagogue – is neither an instructor nor a facilitator but rather someone who interrupts” (Biesta, 2012, p. 693). To interrupt is not to teach actors what to be or to demand particular kinds of learning. To interrupt is to remain open for the opportunities for becoming public by openness to what comes. Thus, when we use the concept of public pedagogy in this article it should be understood in terms of interruption and becoming public (similar to pedagogy as rupture, see Burdick and Sandlin 2013). In the next section, research within political participation and public pedagogy in social media is presented as an example of popular culture that is linked to education.

3 Research in the field of political participation and public pedagogy in social media

This research field is new owing to the phenomenon of social media, which itself is rather new. This explains the limited number of studies in the field. There is, however, an extensive amount of research dealing with digital media, democracy, young people and the political within related fields of research such as the science of media and communication, political communication and political science (Dahlgren, 2007, 2009; Montgomery, 2007; Mossberger et al. 2008; Bakardjieva, 2009; Olsson, & Dahlgren, 2010; Himmelboim, 2011; Östman, 2012). It is, however, hard to find research that may be defined as being linked to political participation and public pedagogy in social media. Such research is mirrored in Loader (2007) and Buckingham (2008), and research such as Wojcieszak and Mutz’s (2009), Fenton’s (2010), Holm Sørensen’s (2010) and Wojcieszak’s (2010). Magdalena Wojcieszak (2010) has, for example, studied neo-Nazi online discussion forums. She finds that the participants understand the conversations as educative. The

participants explicitly say that the conversations have been enlightening and contribute to discovering the ‘truth’ and seeing ‘how it really is’. According to Wojcieszak, these kinds of discussion forums teach debate skills and inform the participants about the way these kinds of skills can be used off-line. They also help the participants to strengthen their arguments, making them able to withstand the arguments of opponents. Wojcieszak has identified a normative pressure to act and live as you learn which, according to Wojcieszak, probably contributes to polarising the political views of the participants towards even more extreme positions. Thus the participants tend to develop even more extreme political views in the discussion forums, which is made possible by the participants’ desire to be educated in directions set by the normative pressure:

online forums offer arguments that rationalise and reinforce member’s perspectives. Members also receive rewarding or punitive replies to their posts and, through normative pressures, might adjust their views to the norm prevalent within the group. (Wojcieszak 2010, p. 649)

Consequently, discussion forums on the Internet contain and create educational situations based on the will to participate.

On the basis of earlier research on the network society (Castells, 2009), the power of communication is visually expressed in social media as a medium that is conditioned and dependent on the communication of its users. Social media represent “places where we go to learn, and places where we learn indirectly as we come to understand ourselves in relation to others and our culture” (Reid 2010, p. 194). It may be argued that “Depending on the particular spaces and uses of social media one examines, one can uncover a variety of public, pedagogic functions” (2010, p. 195). Empirical studies of digital spaces and cultures tend to be more limited. Some empirical work on democratisation and resistance is, according to Sandlin et al. (2011), taken up by Freishtat and Sandlin’s (2010) work on Facebook. And Hayes and Gee (2010) have carried out empirical work on video games such as the Sims and Second Life. In addition, Kellner & Kim (2009) offer deeper insights into YouTube Studies, showing that these sites and practices actually serve to teach the public and how the intended educational meanings of public pedagogies are internalised, reconfigured and mobilised by public citizens. But apart from these eminent studies, empirical research in this field is not exhaustive.

In relation to young people, the research on social media, using the words of Stovall (2010), is characterised by framing social media as being constituted by “co-creating spaces for young people to critically analyse the world while working to change it. Such practices are ‘public’ in the sense that they do not take place behind closed doors. Instead, they are “‘out in the open’ to be challenged and critiqued” (p. 410) (cf. Andersson, 2013).



Overall, the Internet is consolidated in previous research as an increasingly common space for youth socialisation that is yet to be mapped and analysed. In the net community, an example of the social media, the participants' communication depends on the institutional framework of the community, its social infrastructures, its specific rules and norms, a shared history, regular participants and solidarity within the group (Rheingold 1993/2000; Donath, 1999; Herring, 2004b, 2008). Thus net communities are seen as participatory-driven institutions built on communication—as communication communities (Delanty, 2003). In general, this kind of research on social media frames social media, and further net communities, as seemingly new public spaces – dependent on the action of their members. It is on this basis that we can understand the net community as a public institution built on communication.

4 Theory: Expressive agonism

Utilising the depiction of the net community as a kind of social media that opens up for public communication and socialisation, we wish to elaborate theoretically the notion of the political in relation to social media by using Hannah Arendt's term expressive agonism.

The political theory of agonism emphasises controversy as a constitutive dimension and value in the (democratic) society. This dimension stresses that there are always on going struggles about the way society should be organised, and that it is always difficult to decide in advance which groupings will be politically relevant in the future. The progress of society is dependent on political articulations determining how we act, think and consequently shape society. When accepting this idea, the concept of *contingency* is vital in the understanding of agonism; everything could have been the other way around. What we call society, all types of institutional arrangements and so on are only temporary arrangements accepted and anticipated as objective. As Carsten Ljunggren argues: "in Arendt's agonism the person itself, an agonistic subjectivity, is the starting point in the procedure" (2010, p. 22). Expressive agonism offers freedom, the ability of the unique individual to take place (cf. Arendt, 1958/1998). Political life, according to Arendt, is constituted by controversies that should be dealt with in competition between adversaries. Humans may be seen as free when acting in the public sphere. They are free as long as they have the possibility to act – to act is to be free, a value in itself (Arendt, 1954/2004). To act is a disposition of the individual based on knowledge, considerations, habits, traditions and will-based motivation. Thus, in this view, action is not primarily rational. It builds on moral beliefs, emotional and will-based passions in the form of both sympathies and antipathies (Ljunggren, 2007). It is the *political action* – an end in itself when taking responsibility, by entry and appearance on the world stage by words and deeds – of the individual that opens up for pluralism and diversity. This further means that institutions of society must be constantly subject to political rebirth if humans are to be

free. This makes expressive agonism radical – to search, preserve and promote new spaces of freedom – involving new forms of political gatherings and engagement.

Arendt's agonism is expressive and radical since it emphasises difference and the particular rather than similarities and the general as active forces for action, *political* action. As such, expressive agonism is a condition for, and situation of, self-identification. What we want to suggest is that Arendt's expressive agonism offers opportunities to deepen our insight into the net community's potential as a "the public quality of human togetherness and thus [for] the possibility of actors and events to become public" (Biesta, 2012, p. 693). More precisely, an agonistic approach to social media, the public and education aims to provide analytical tools for the exploration of *political* opportunities for young participants for joint communication and the exploration of themselves and of different conditions of the social order in society. Before presenting the empirical results from Black Heart, we discuss the methods used.

5 Method

Case study is used as a guiding methodological principle and the methodology itself is called polemic agonism. This methodology has been further developed into what we call political interest play.

5.1 Empirical selection: Black Heart

There are several net communities in Sweden that exist for different reasons and purposes. The net community 'Black Heart' has been chosen because:

- it explicitly targets young people whose age corresponds to the Swedish official definition of young people; age 13 to 26)
- it is driven by young people on a voluntary basis and excludes other types of net communities built up by companies to earn money through young people's communicative activities
- it is semi-public, which means that you can observe the activities but you have to be a member in order to produce content and join in the activities, and it is non-political and non-ideological.

This community describes itself as democratic, equal and lawful. It is guided by a specific framework comprising regulations and agreements, an institutional framework that the members are expected to abide by. If they do not, they can be warned, suspended or expelled. In autumn 2012, when the empirical research part of the project was completed, the community had about 90,000 members. These members are young people from all over Sweden with different ethnic backgrounds, gender, age, culture and so on. The conversations held in Swedish (ten threads defined as politically controversial) that have been analysed amount to a total of 372 webpages containing 3,708 posts (entities created



by the participants in the conversation). The members themselves create the ten threads, choosing what they should be about and in which discussion forum they should be placed. Each discussion forum, for example Food or Politics, contains different threads, each dealing with a different topic. The average age of the participants in these conversations is 17, the gender distribution is even and most participants also take part in other activities in the net community.

5.2 Case study and polemic agonism

Case study has been used as a strategy to approach the cases, their institutional character and the on going controversial political conversations in Black Heart. As Robert Yin (2006) argues, “Case study research enables you to investigate important topics not easily covered by other methods” (p. 112). Direct observation and data collection in a natural virtual environment, on a daily basis, over a three-year period was the method used. Thus the study was longitudinal (i.e. carried out over time), exploratory, descriptive and focused on an increased understanding of the cases (cf. Yin, 2006). Using polemic agonism implies, in this case, a methodology that is discourse-oriented and which views the use of language as constituting political action. Three assumptions guide the use of polemic agonism building on CMDA (Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis): language has recurring patterns; language involves the speaker’s choice; and computer-mediated language can be, but is not inevitably, shaped by technological functions in computer-mediated communication systems (cf. Herring, 2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2010).

Polemic agonism is a type of rhetoric that builds on competition, confrontation and conflict (Roberts-Miller 2002). It requires a substantial debate in which the participants are committed to creating their own arguments—a public dialogue of the self with the self. Expressing and advancing arguments in a community of others means that “one must be open to the criticism others will make of it” (ibid., p. 589). When the communication is built on conflict—a situation in which conflict is viewed as a necessary product of difference creating controversy—it is agonistic. The conversation is agonistic not because the participants seek conflict but because conflict is part of the conversation. Using polemic agonism, we think, reinforces and underlines the persuasive character of a conversation, not necessarily to win the consent of others but also to contribute to effective communication in which argumentation can help to identify disagreements. Polemical agonism is characterised by advancing arguments that clarify the personal attitude and why this approach is taken, which can provoke and evoke criticism and counterarguments (Roberts-Miller, 2002).

5.3 Analysis: communicative conditions and the characteristics of political action

Our analysis has focused on the institutional character and the political conversations in Black Heart in order to

find out the communicative conditions of the institution and the characteristics of the political actions. The analysis was conducted in two phases. In *Phase I* an institutional analysis was made in three steps aiming at 1) contextualising the net community; 2) identifying the conditions for participation in the conversations; 3) identifying the conditions for participation in on-going conversations. In *Step 1* all public parts of the net community were observed and five analytical questions were posed:

- a. How is the community described by itself (by the institution and its members)?
- b. For whom is the net community designed and permitted?
- c. What are the rules and agreements for participating in the net community?
- d. What types of activities are offered?
- e. How is the net community arranged, organised and operated?

In *Step 2* all threads in the discussion forums that had, for various reasons, been closed down were analysed in order to find out why they were closed down; that is, to find out what was prohibited and what was permitted. In *Step 3* the study’s selection of conversations (threads) was analysed using five analytical questions aimed at finding out the conditions for participating in the on-going conversations:

- a. What rules are expressed?
- b. What kinds of social conversational patterns emerge?
- c. How are the participants expected to communicate?
- d. What is permitted and what is prohibited in the conversations?
- e. How do the administrators (ADMINS) participate in the conversations?

In *Phase II*, the concept of *political interest play* was used as an analytical concept consisting of the rhetorical resources of stake and interest. We define rhetorical resources as typified actions that are repeated over time and that participants use and relate to in order to perform certain communicative acts. Thus political interest play is a concept used to understand the phenomenon of effective communication, which can either strengthen or undermine political actions and the political interests that are at hand. The analysis of political interest play involves an analysis on the operational level – how something is said and what this saying constructs in the conversation (cf. Potter, 1996; Billig, 2001; Wetherell, 2001). Potter (1996) argues that *stake* and *interest*, in their strongest sense, are used to show that the person or institution always has something to win or lose. Wetherell (2001) writes that:



questions of stake are key concerns of participants in an interaction. People treat each other as having vested interests, desires, motives and allegiances (as having a stake in some position or other) and this is a problem if one wants one's version of events to be heard as authoritative and persuasive, factual, not interested or biased but the simple, plain, unvarnished truth. (p. 21)

Two main categories of stake, stake confession and stake inoculation (Potter, 1996; Antaki & Wetherell, 1999; LeCouteur, 2001; Augoustinos et al., 2002), have been used to develop two main types of political interest play – *direct interest play*, which is an open and transparent form of rhetoric, and *indirect interest play*, which is a closed and hidden form of rhetoric. In the practical analysis, this involves an analysis of different types of actions that take place and how they operate in the conversation. Hence, different types of political interest play and their functions were analysed. When identifying political actions that could be characterised as *direct interest play*, the focus was on:

- a. explicit recognition that there are political interests at stake
- b. defence of expressed political interests
- c. positions (negative/positive, disagree/agree etc.) based on political interests

When identifying political actions that could be characterised as *indirect interest play*, the focus was on:

- a. disinterest, impartiality or alleged ignorance
- b. the use of 'hybrid voice' – an outside voice is used to argue in favour of political interests at stake
- c. excessive and /or false consensus or descriptions of something as 'natural', neutral or objective
- d. attempts at two or more positions that are projected as equally bad/good

Thus, when analysing the characteristics of political action in the conversations, the concept of *political interest play* has been used and operationalized in terms of direct and indirect interest play. The qualitative analysis was refined in an iterated process and twelve types of political interest play were finally constructed. The contents of these twelve types were examined and they were eventually consolidated into four categories of political action (Challenge, Give support, Apply pressure and Go deep) in order to highlight the characteristics of political action.

6 Results: Young people's educational situation in Black Heart

The excerpt below from the conversation *Abortion – Right or Wrong?* illustrates the main characteristics of the controversial political conversations in Black Heart:

M₁: We can survive without meat, yet we do not refrain from eating it. My question is why this is so. If animals were valued as strongly as humans, people would never eat animals. Or how is it, do they slaughter people where you live?

A₁: I refrain. I value animals as much as humans, if not more. You got the wrong guy to play and discuss this with.

M₂: Okay, you and some other people refrain. But it is still the case that most people do not refrain, and it's people in general I'm talking about. So you don't have to see it as an attack, little man.

A₂: "Attack"? "Little man"? Haha, you make it sound as if I lie under you and take offense? No, I do what I'm amazingly good at, to present arguments. I do not take this argument seriously; you are just talking a bunch of crap.

M₃: Haha, are you good at arguing? When people have other opinions than you, you can't even take them seriously.

A₃: But that's the point. It seems that you have no opinions. You just throw out random arguments.

M₄: I have an opinion, I think abortion is right, and I've said why I think that. You can go back in the thread if you missed it. I also took up the notion that I think people GENERALLY value "our kind" higher. The proof of this is that most of us eat animals even if we could survive without. We breed and eat animals, things that we would never do to our own "kind". If you think what I say is random, then it is your opinion, and I accept it. Nevertheless, I still think the way I do. I do not think it is random anywhere because what I'm saying actually belongs to the discussion, it is not off topic.

This excerpt makes explicit the types of conditions for communication that the participants have to abide by. As shown in the excerpt, participants are required to have a *content focus* (M₅: 'what I'm saying actually belongs to the conversation, it is not off topic'). There is a requirement to stay on the topic and maintain a clear content focus in the conversations. Participants must be able to define, select, apply and add content to the conversation. One aspect of this is the OT-rule, not to be or go off topic, which requires subject and content awareness. Participants are expected to manage and search for information and use relevant sources. They are further expected to be able to evaluate, and select relevant information and the right amount of information. They should be able to make references, hyperlink and apply the information in a new context, namely in the current conversation. In order to maintain a good and welcoming conversation climate, Black Heart uses ADMINS, certain



members of the community that control and govern the conversations. They make sure that the participants follow regulations and agreements in the institution. They take on the role of technical operators, content focusers, conversation organisers, rule followers and supervisors, conflict solvers, listeners and friends. ADMINS, or what could be called *administration educators*, oblige participants to follow the regulations and agreements of the institution.

Controversy seems to be the democratic fuel in the conversations, requiring the participants to meet each other's arguments in the conversations within accepted rules and norms, a requirement to publicly express views and take up political positions. The conversations are strongly characterised by competition, trying to argue against those adversaries who occupy other political positions while at the same time arguing with oneself. This is shown in the excerpt below from a conversation called *Islam, Muslims and The Middle East*.

M₁: I am no fan of religion per se, but I do not understand why everyone is so incredibly critical of especially Islam.

N₁: Maybe it is like Germany in the 20-30???? 20th?? century. I quote Jimmie Åkesson [*authors' comments: the leader of the political party 'Swedish Democrats', with right-wing sympathies involving non-/small-scale immigration as a political goal*]; "Islam is our greatest threat." I have no doubt that Hitler said something like that too.

M₂: Yes, and that's why it is so incredibly scary.

L₁: if you read about religions and then compare you should see ^^

M₃: After having discussed with you before, it's pretty clear that the one who needs to read and learn more in this case is you. I have rarely discussed with such an incredibly narrow-minded and prejudiced person, you do not even know what the hell you're talking about.

L₂: I have read a lot about Islam, so it's pretty funny how wrong you are: P??? Do?? you think that when you read about it you do not think that religion is so dangerous, I hate it the more I read about it ^^

M₄: I would hardly discuss with you if I had not been knowledgeable? It's funny how wrong YOU are. You think that everything Islam is about is the oppression of women, etc., and you seem to believe that this is the case in every country.

L₃: I think women are oppressed in the Koran, which is why I also think that they are oppressed in countries where the Koran is followed, period.

The conversations are also characterised by encouragement, confirmations, reprimands and suggestions for appropriate behaviour. Participants are requested to be socially receptive, contributory and friendly. Personal attacks, insults, harassment etcetera are prohibited, although they occur. Participants need to know the regulations and the norms that apply in order to use them in communication. This requires social receptivity, the ability to navigate and interact with other participants. Participants are expected to use specific vocabulary, and have good writing and reading skills. As a participant you are expected to express yourself clearly, and explain, discuss and develop positions that can be comprehended by others. The requirement for this type of ability is based on a desire to understand, and to work for reciprocity and community and content focus.

The characteristic feature of political action in the conversations is confrontational and combative political communication. The political actions of the participants are manifested by publication and testing of personal political positions and thoughts. This testing is done by arguing for one's own political positions, upholding specific political interests and challenging other people's opinions. Thus, this form of political participation requires the participants to be able to consider their own as well as other people's judgments—to familiarise them-selves with how they think and how others think. Four categories of political action have been identified. The most dominant one, a category characterised by direct interest play, is *To challenge*.

To challenge involves a political action in which political interests are at stake. Such actions are characterized by being straight, honest, open, accommodating, confrontational and confirmatory. This is illustrated in the conversation *Global warming is a hoax!*:

C₁: The mass hysteria on global warming have??? has been frightening me for several years now. It is disturbing to see how it has been transformed from an economic idea under?? during the 80's to a racist cult of pure insanity. Nowadays, it just gets on my nerves.

F₁: I totally agree with what you just wrote!

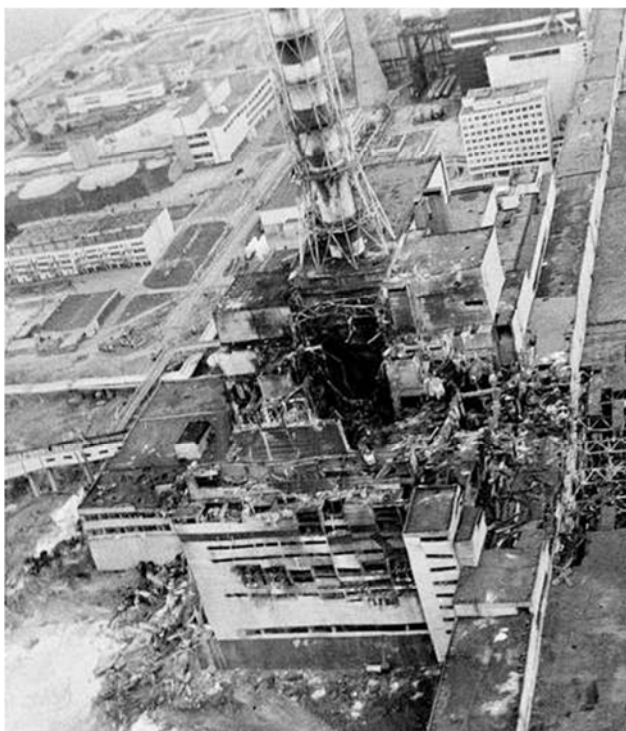
This type of political action involves a public proclamation; it openly inquires, challenging one's own political interests and those of others, making an invitation to join in the public political battle in which political interests are at stake. These types of action contribute to political positioning, at the same time as they create an open, honest place for conversation in which political life is discussed and questioned. Such political action dominates the conversations (66 % of all posts). *Giving support* (22 % of all posts) is a type of political action providing implicit protection of political interests (indirect interest play) which is made visible in the following conversation: *Should the right wing nationalist party of Sweden Democrats be allowed to visit Swedish schools?*:



D₁: Suppose somebody from, say Nordic Youth, had beaten you up, and they later turned up at your school? Do you think you would care that much if a few adults were present?

K₁: There are people who have been beaten up by immigrants. Should all immigrants be kept out of school just because scared victims with prejudices want it that way?

Announcements and defences of political interests are made discreetly by not exposing them openly and simultaneously defending them by calling into question the accuracy of other arguments and pointing out those specific conditions and political interests that are at stake. *Applying pressure* (9 % of all posts) is a type of political action which questions and critiques political interests. It is characterized by demonstrating that there are multiple perspectives in a political issue, which at the same time safeguards its own perspective. This is illustrated in the conversation on *Energy* in which the participant uses a picture to argue in favour of wind energy:



K₁: Nuclear power better than wind power?

These political actions take place through a hidden rhetoric that questions, devalues, and tries to lower the credibility of other participants' communicative actions without putting their own favoured political interests at stake (indirect interest play). Finally, *Going deep* (3 % of all posts) is a type of political action that reveals the motives for those political interests at stake. Such action is characterised by the exposure of one's own personal experiences and political preferences to make visible

personal motives in political interests and positions asserted by an essentially open rhetoric (direct interest play), which clearly addresses and presents personal experiences.

What has now been presented illustrates and constitutes an educational situation. This situation, we argue, is a type of public pedagogy carried out by the political actions of young people when using the social media as public space. We will further elaborate this line of argument in the discussion.

7 Discussion: social media and young people's political participation as public pedagogy

What kind of educational situation is generated in young people's political participation in a net community by and for young people? The political participation that takes place in the net community builds up an educational situation that involves certain vital characteristics: communication, community building, a strong content focus and content production, argumentation and rule following. What is at stake, we argue, is that young people's political participation in the social media generates educational situations. These situations could be described as education as political will formation, which can be seen as a form of public pedagogy that denotes the key event of becoming public.

We suggest that the political conversations in Black Heart, taken together, give rise to an educational situation that is carried out by the participants themselves and their joint acts, building on their will and ability to deal with the conflicts and differences between them that their will and ability give rise to. This educational situation takes place in a (semi-) public space built up by a constant social balance and mutual exchange of meaning between the participants. The social balance is needed because, ultimately, the young participants' joint communicative acting is what carries the institution forward. It is dependent on their willingness and ability to communicate and collaborate, and to contribute arguments, information and content to the conversations.

What we wish to stress is that education, like the characteristics of the social media, comes into existence as a consequence of owning a social space as a practice of communication, making both communication and participation the key elements in education. If we accept this normative standpoint, the educational situation of Black Heart could be viewed as a type of political will formation that has the potential to give birth to educational situations in and through which newcomers' beginnings can occur.

The type of political communication expressed in Black Heart stresses the notion that moral beliefs, emotional and will-based passions, in the form of sympathies as well as antipathies, are crucial for both political and educational action. This further shows that Black Heart has a composition in which communication becomes a



matter of understanding oneself as well as promoting meaning exchanges between participants. It is in the net community's communication, through encounters with other participants, that personal experiences and attitudes have the chance to be challenged and new (political) beginnings may come into existence. The critical element in this communication is the possibility for the person to define him/herself through communicative action taking. It is precisely here that the participation links up with learning and becomes both a political and an educational matter.

The political and educational incentive in this communicative situation can, according to Ljunggren (2007, p. 232), be understood as communication with a double and tension-filled base that is carried forward by both personal and joint willingness in which common values and beliefs must be negotiated, justified and discussed. It is in this negotiation that the participants create what could be considered a creative public (cf. Castells, 2009). Their interaction forms networks of communication that produce a shared sense of content. In this way, young people constitute an active, connected and, for each other, 'loud' public together. But this creative and content-producing public also imposes certain requirements on each participant's individual behaviour. As a participant, you sense this pressure as you experience the need to communicate and navigate in the community in certain ways. You have to be able to communicate and navigate in the community and contribute in the production of content in the conversations. Hence, this creative event is far from unconditioned; the co-production of 'the public' imposes certain requirements on each participant's individual communicative behaviour. This 'fact' points back to the net community Black Heart itself, which is assumed to be built on basic democratic values (freedom of speech, equality, gender equality, openness, influence, conflict, conversations and engagement). This digital institution comprises certain hierarchies, divisions of roles and shifting decision-making processes and possibilities for the participants to have influence. When it comes to the participants, it could be said that they not only contribute to the construction of a creative public, but they also define themselves – and are being defined by each other and also by the very institutional 'arrangement' itself—as being part of a creative public through their political communicative actions and meaning-making processes. It is in this mutual process, we argue, that the participants, as well as the communicative conditions and actions that take place, jointly give rise to a truly political event—that of *becoming public*.

The educational process in the creative public in Black Heart, we argue, consists in the creation of something new. Adopting our theoretical approach, the actual educational character of this process is, more precisely, defined by the simultaneous joint and personal advancement of new forms of public spaces in the public sphere

(cf. Andersson, 2013; Olson, 2013). It is in and through the experience of participation in such (semi-) public spaces that the educational situation is created (although this by no mean implies that the situation necessarily becomes educational, cf. Wojcieszak, 2010). This means that the educational potential is far from given in advance, but it has a continuous and ever-present opportunity to emerge in the net community – as well as in other digitally driven, interactive social media that focus on conversation on various topics. This potential is actualised in that these (semi-) public, digital spaces centre on political communication in which the participants' expression/opinion-voicing, argumentation and debating skills can be performed and qualified through this shared communication. But the potential is also actualised in that these spaces provide opportunities for the participants to become political public beings in and through this communication, since the question of self-identification arises in communication.

All in all, we suggest that the educative impetus offered to the participants in the net community, as well as in other social media can be depicted as a practice of public pedagogy—pedagogy in which conversations about various kinds of political issues, controversial or not – offer opportunities to teach about and for and to learn from and through democracy. These potential learning processes for the participants involved are far from solely positive. They may equally well offer teaching about and learning from the less beautiful parts of (what is presumed to be) democracy. However, education and its pedagogical practices have never been unambiguous or clear-cut about democracy or any other issue for that matter. Education is rather characterised – and can only be characterised—by risk, unpredictability and insecurity (Biesta, 2014). Consequently, it is important to ask: What can be learned from being a person who acts politically? This in itself is nothing new but rather un-problematized in an educational situation that has become increasingly digitally driven. The importance of social media in the development of informal democracy learning and socialisation means that it deserves deeper empirical insights. The theoretically underpinned concept of public pedagogy may offer a productive framework for future research in the field.

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Endnote

¹ Generally, there is a need for theoretical development and clearness when taking on different aspects of the citizens' political involvement in society. A range of concepts abound the field. We have chosen political participation even if it is a contested and complex concept that has been given different meanings (Ekman and Amnå 2012). In the article political participation denotes; participation and influence in the processes and situations that are characterised by a struggle between people and groups of people about how life and public resources in the community should be arranged.



Esa Syeed, Pedro Noguera

When Parents United: A Historical Case Study Examining the Changing Civic Landscape of American Urban Education Reform

In this article we explore recent history to uncover the role that public engagement has played in the effort to reform America's urban schools. In the place of narratives that focus on elite actors (foundations, unions, corporations, etc.), we focus on the role of local stakeholders. Specifically, we look to how the changing political context (policy agendas and governance structures) of urban school systems has shifted possibilities for communities to participate in determining the direction of reform efforts in urban school systems. Through interviews and archival research, we examine the case of a single parent-led advocacy organization, Parents United for the D.C. Public Schools. Established in 1980 and remaining active until the late 1990s, Parents United developed a broad-based vision of educational equity and had a significant impact on the local public school system during that time. We show that in the current political and social context of education reform, communities may derive important lessons from Parents United while also devising new strategies for public engagement.

Keywords:

Urban education, public engagement/activism, education reform

1 Introduction

The direction of urban education reform in the United States is characterized by highly contentious debates and conflicts typically pitting policymakers, philanthropists and corporate executives against teachers unions and their allies (Fabricant & Fine, 2012; Bulkley & Burch, 2009; Hannaway & Rotherham, 2006). These battles are playing out in major cities across the country and have contributed to a climate where compromise and pursuit of common interests have been difficult to achieve (Brill 2011). At the heart of this struggle lie deep divisions over the role that various forms of market-based measures (i.e. choice, charter schools, etc.) should play in shaking up a system where failure has been chronic and pervasive for many years (Hill 2010, Ravitch 2010). The conflict pits market reform advocates against those who regard traditional forms of democratic governance (i.e. locally elected school boards, collective bargaining, etc.) as essential to the viability of public schools (Goldstein 2014, Lipman 2011).

Less visible in the conflict between these competing constituencies are the interests and voices of parents and concerned community members who are frequently

spoken about, but who rarely have the ability to articulate their independent concerns. These grassroots actors typically do not enjoy the same level of influence as more powerful actors unless, of course, they are sufficiently organized to force other constituencies to take them seriously (Warren & Mapp, 2011; Shirley, 1997).

In this article we explore recent history of parent organizing in Washington D.C. (henceforth referred to as the District) to uncover and examine the role that public engagement has played in the effort to reform America's urban schools. Several education historians have pointed out that throughout the twentieth century successive waves of urban reformers have risen up to take on recalcitrant urban school systems only to find their attempts at improving educational outcomes thwarted (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Ravitch, 2010; Mehta, 2013). A careful reading of these experiments in urban education reform reveals that at different stages of history powerful elites in politics and business have been able to influence the character of education policy at the state and federal levels, while at other times teacher unions and their allies have had the upper hand (Tyack, 1974; Hannaway & Rotherham, 2006). In this paper we will show that at certain moments in history, grassroots community-based organizations have been able to effectively insert themselves into the debate over the direction of education policy at the local level. Through an analysis of parent organizing in the District we show that there are several dimensions to public engagement in education that have been important to the development of policy. Building on the work of other scholars who have studied civic engagement and education policy (Orr & Rogers, 2011; Oakes et al. 2009), we define public engagement as the means by which local stakeholders

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are able to act collectively to influence policy-making processes that impact their schools and communities. In the forthcoming analysis we look at how the dynamics of public engagement interact with the powerful interests that have historically dominated governance in urban school systems.

For the purposes of this article, we use a single community group based in the District - Parents United for the D.C. Public Schools. Parents United existed before No Child Left Behind and its federal mandates initiated dramatic changes to the civic landscape of U.S. education reform in 2002. Long before the introduction of high stakes tests and expanded school choice policies, public school parents formed Parents United as a city-wide advocacy group that would have an impact on the direction of education in the District in the 1980's and 1990's. We revisit this history to explore how changes in the political and social context of schooling have shaped opportunities for public engagement in a city that has long experienced conflict over what is euphemistically described as "home rule"¹, and suffered the deep frustration over the dysfunction that has characterized its public education system. As we will show, Parents United, a community organization that is barely known outside of the District, found a way to wield significant influence over education policymaking by developing a multi-faceted advocacy organization with a city-wide presence. We also show that in the current political context of education reform, in order for communities to develop similar levels of community-based and parent-led advocacy, they must address a series of new challenges that require new forms of public engagement.

The present research comes at a crucial time in the ongoing debate over urban school reform. Several researchers and policymakers are revisiting the role of parents and communities in education reform and re-conceptualizing what role, if any, public engagement should play. Mehta (2013) has recently called into question the effectiveness of top-down reforms that are fashioned by policymakers whose understanding of the implementation context is remote and less informed. As these debates over policy play themselves out, major U.S. cities like New York, Chicago, Milwaukee, New Orleans and Los Angeles continue to be mired in polarizing conflicts over the direction of education reform (Hernandez, 2013; Whitmire, 2011; Star-Ledger Editorial Board, 2014; Fernández & Williams, 2014; Miner 2013). In the face of turbulent conflict, several researchers have asserted that local community-based organizations can serve as a stabilizing force that can bring about sustained reforms in this highly contentious environment (Stone et al., 2001; Hill et al., 2000). Though it has consistently been shown that parents who are involved in their children's education tend to perform better academically (Epstein, 2001; Noguera, 2003; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013), policy makers and elected officials have been reluctant to recognize the potential importance of including parental and community voice in decision making. In the pages ahead we show how

parent and community engagement in public education was able to influence the direction of policy in the District in ways that benefited the children served.

The focus on high-level political battles has at times ignored the challenges parents and communities must overcome to participate in shaping the future of their schools. Numerous studies have documented the institutional and social obstacles that low-income and minority communities—who historically make up the majority of urban school students—must contend with to advocate for the health and well-being of their children. These parents must often contend with schools that are not responsive to their styles of interaction, district administrators that are indifferent to their needs, complicated bureaucratic processes that require technical expertise, and racial discrimination in more direct forms (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Chambers, 2006; Noguera, 2001; Rothstein, 2004). In this article, we take these contextual factors into account as we follow the suggestion of Orr and Rogers (2011) who have encouraged researchers to examine how public policies and social contexts may facilitate or hinder opportunities for communities to take part in education reform processes.

2 Framing the civic landscape of public education

Drawing upon lessons learned from attempts to reform urban schools in cities throughout the U.S. over the last decade, a number of researchers and policymakers have engaged in a reinvigorated discussion related to the role of public engagement in school improvement efforts today. This discussion is characterized by two confounding trends. On the one hand, scholars have been attentive to new forms of engagement elicited by large, private foundations and how these powerful interests are limiting, and in some cases actively undermining, the role of unions and other civic organizations in influencing the direction of change (Fabricant & Fine 2012; Bulkley, Burch, 2009; Ravitch, 2010). On the other hand, another growing body of research is drawing attention to the expanding role of community groups in mobilizing urban residents to collective action to improve their schools at the grassroots level (Lopez, 2003; Mediratta et al. 2009). These studies have often provided detailed accounts of how community groups' function and the strategies they use to achieve results (Shirley, 1997; Su, 2009; Warren & Mapp, 2011). A cursory reading of these two bodies of literature suggests that the current conflict over education reform is about much more than the prominent personalities of reformers themselves or the particular issues they debate over, like teacher evaluations or charter schools. Lurking beneath the surface of these debates are fundamental conflicts over the role of public institutions (e.g. who should lead them and who they should be accountable to) and the future of democratic decision-making at the local level. The present study places the strategic advocacy work of Parents United within its unique historical context to better understand how community-based groups have influenced local education policy, and why at certain times their influence



has waned. The central question guiding this research is: How did the political and social context shape opportunities for Parents United to influence education decision-making in the District? The answer to this question should prove useful to those who are interested in exploring possibilities for parents and communities to organize and shape the character of education in the present.

To guide the research, we introduce the concept of a civic landscape to frame this analysis. The civic landscape consists of features of both the *political context*, particularly with respect to governance and policy agendas, as well as features of a community group's *strategic choices* that have bearing on how issues are framed, alliances are formed (particularly across race and class differences), and the tactics that are utilized to pursue collective goals. As we examine the relationship between the two, we extend the metaphor of a civic landscape by building on Henig's (2011) discussion of a "political grid" that arranges key education actors according to how they relate to governance structures and policy agendas. As we show in the pages ahead, changing political configurations open up some possibilities for public engagement in public education while restricting others. A leading scholar of collective action, Meyer (2004) points out that particular political contexts provide an advantage to certain mobilization strategies, thus making some appear more legitimate and effective than others. As a result, some groups are positioned to develop credibility and are able to acquire powerful allies while others are not. Advocating a more dynamic view of political contexts, social movement scholars like Jasper (2004) have proposed that researchers examine the strategic choices of groups or organizations engaging in collective action. Finding other social movement frameworks overly reliant on structure, Jasper suggests that "[w]ithout examining the act of selecting and applying tactics, we cannot adequately explain the psychological, organizational, cultural, and structural factors that help explain these choices (2)." For this reason, in this study the strategic choices of Parents United are doubly relevant and important to empirical analyses of collective action in that they not only offer a sense of what is possible or effective in public engagement, but also help us to understand the contours of the broader political and social context as well. Although studies that focus on both the impact of political contexts and groups strategies are rare (Amenta et al., 1999), this study will uniquely unite both to understand how Parents United navigated political institutions and social realities during particular period of education reform.

While a multitude of factors may contribute to the political context of public engagement, we focus on critical developments in two areas that appear to be particularly influential in studies of public education's civic landscape: governance structures and policy agendas (Gold et al., 2007; Cuban & Usdan, 2003; Henig, 2011). Policy experts have long sparred on the issue of

school governance, questioning how broadly decision-making powers and accountability structures should engage non-elite stakeholders like parents or students (Conley, 2003). Movements for both community control and centralized authority have repeatedly pushed the governance of school systems in America's urban centers back and forth (Lewis, 2013; Goldstein, 2014). Policy agendas, on the other hand, are important markers of what decision-makers think about particular policy issues and how they choose to address them. Education policy agendas targeting low-performing, unwieldy urban school systems have long been marked by a perceived need for increased scientific management, rigorous accountability structures, and greater uniformity and standardization in instruction (Tyack, 1974; Mehta, 2013).

Within the wide array of strategic choices made in collective action, three key areas emerge consistently in the literature as central to all groups: issue framing, relationship-building, and tactics for direct action. First, community groups must determine how they communicate their position to garner broader support through deliberate signifying work known as issue framing (Benford, 1997). These frames articulate a diagnosis of the issue that groups seek to address, but also offer a sense of what they believe must be done to remedy their concerns (Gamson, 1992). Second, community groups must consider from among diverse and well-documented repertoires of actions, what kinds of tactics they will use to achieve their objectives. Tactics may range from disruptive protests, to more conventional approaches like direct and persuasive appeals to political leaders and letter writing (Tarrow, 1998). Finally, community groups must also determine which constituencies to cooperate and cultivate relationships with. From an organizing perspective, relationship-building is one of the most fundamental blocks of building political influence and power (Ganz, 2010). In addition to cultivating a membership base and coalitions, community groups also work to exert influence upon political actors who hold decision-making power (Amenta et al. 1996). The strategic choices made by civic groups may also reflect the particular sentiments and outlooks that are related to racial, class, and or political identities of group members (Piven & Cloward, 1977; Jasper, 1997; Bob, 2012). Taken together, close analysis of the set of strategic actions taken by community groups helps us to generate a more holistic sense of what collective action in public education looks like and allows us to better map out the topography of the civic landscape along demographic lines as well.

3 Research approach

In order to situate ourselves in the period in which Parents United was most active in the civic landscape of the District, we first accessed the group's archives housed in the Special Collections at George Washington University to analyze how it carried out its work from 1980 - 1998. Poring over hundreds of pages of internal



documents, newsletters, grant applications, meeting minutes, and member diaries, we were able to piece together a comprehensive portrait of the group's activities, identity, and guiding principles. Newspaper clippings helped fill out the contextual elements surrounding Parents United's activities, and at times offer critical viewpoints on their work. To supplement the documentary analysis, we were able to contact five former members of Parents United who all had held important leadership positions in the group. In addition to their intimate knowledge of Parents United, the interviewees also brought a wealth of other relevant experiences. Among them, most had served as presidents of the Parent Teacher Associations in their individual children's schools, two had served as School Board members, and all continue to be engaged in schools in various capacities at the present. Interview questions focused on understanding Parents United's position within the political context of the time, the various strategic actions the group undertook, and group members' reflections on critical changes in the educational landscape. While this article confirms some aspects of earlier studies of Parents United (Speicher, 1992; Henig et al., 1999), we have also developed unique insights that can help inform public engagement practices in the current reform context.

4 Context: The District's evolving civic landscape

The District is an intriguing setting in which to study education politics. As a federal city, the District's local government is influenced, and often dominated, in instrumental ways by the national government. In certain critical areas, national-level politicians have made incursions into the governance of the District, which they have looked upon as a proving ground for their social ideals. For example, the U.S. Congress has supported a variety of school choice and voucher programs to reform what many regarded as a troubled system (Buckley & Schneider, 2009; Ford, 2005). As the home to the national government, the District has often been at the forefront of many controversies and trends in education politics before they have become manifest in other large, urban school systems throughout the United States.

Governance of the District's schools has long been associated with both democratic promise and political conflict. In 1969, voters were given the opportunity to elect members of the School Board; a concession that constituted the first local political representation the otherwise disenfranchised federal city had in generations (Levy 2004). With representatives from across the District, the School Board was given the charge of setting education policy for the city's schools as an independent body with a degree of autonomy from other branches of local government. While the Mayor allocated funds and the D.C. Council (the city's legislative body) approved the school budget, the elected School Board exercised line item authority on how money was spent. Many former Parents United members recall the School Board as an important point of access for parents and communities

seeking to voice concerns about public education. As one interviewee said, the School Board provided parents with a vital "pipeline" that provided a platform for representing parent and community interests. However, the fondness expressed for the democratic ideals of the School Board is tempered by what many officials and residents saw as a widespread lack of efficiency and accountability in the school system's operations. In fact, studies and articles from that period show that the School Board was one of the most widely criticized agencies in city government (Diner, 1990; Figueroa, 1992). Aside from charges of ineffectiveness and finger-pointing related to mismanagement, the machinations of the School Board and its members at times attained tabloid-like status with splashy headlines about its raucous hearings and personality politics (Witt, 2007). During the city's 1996 fiscal crisis, the U.S. Congress wasted no time in stepping in and appointing a Control Board to oversee various government operations, including public education. In their report, the Control Board called for changes to governance of the school system, citing the "deplorable record of the District's public schools by every important educational and management measure" and further targeting the "deeply divided" School Board for upheaval (Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority 1996). These episodes indicate that education governance has long been a contested issue in American society with implications for public engagement.

Although contemporary reformers often claim that the problems confronting urban schools are the outcome of neglect, the District's schools actually underwent a series of tumultuous changes in policy during the 1980's and 1990's, the period when Parents United was most active. During these years, several prominent reformers brought in new sets of administrative and instructional tools that they promised would reform the moribund system. Inconsistency in leadership and shifting policy agendas posed a major challenge to parents who sought to influence education in the District. With 12 different superintendents serving from 1980 to 2007—an average of just over two years for each leader—the school system appeared almost ungovernable (Turque, 2010). The transience in leadership, and the intense conflicts over the direction of education politics during this period reflected widespread anxieties about the state of American public education. These concerns were later outlined in the seminal report, *A Nation at Risk*, released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). The alarming report decried the "rising tide of mediocrity" in U.S. schools, and gave new life to the movement for standardization and accountability that continues to dominate policy discussions today.

Throughout the period that we examine – 1980 - 1998, the District's public schools were constantly referred to as "broken" or beset by "crisis" (Witt, 2007; Lartigue, 2004). Problems facing the schools were compounded by sweeping demographic changes. With the exodus of middle class white families from the city and its schools



following efforts to desegregate the schools in the 1960s and '70s following the Supreme Court's mandates, the city's public school population became largely African American and low income. From 1980 until the early 2000's, African American students comprised well over 80% of the public school population, with white student enrollment hovered at around 5% (Parents United, 2005). Students designated as socioeconomically disadvantaged have made up the majority of the school population for generations (21st Century Schools Fund, 2013b). The District's schools also faced a number of difficulties during this period due to a series of financial and political dilemmas. Chronicling the grave condition of America's ghetto schools in his classic work, *Savage Inequalities*, Jonathan Kozol (1991) visited with Parents United members when he came to the District. His account of his visit to the District was a harrowing one, likening the city to a war zone in a distant corner of the world and overcome by prostitution, drugs, and crime. He cites studies of District students that are described as experiencing "shell-shock" and "battle fatigue," while "they live surrounded by the vivid symbols of their undesirable status: drugs and death, decay and destitution" (Kozol, 1991, p. 185-6). Throughout the time period of this study, the city was consistently held up as a symbol of urban decay (Jaffe & Sherwood, 1994), and its schools were often characterized as epitomizing the failure of public institutions.

5 The rise of Parents United

Along the rocky terrain formed by shifting school governance and policy agendas, Parents United struck a strategic path they believed would improve the District's schools. In the following sections we document the rise of Parents United, focusing particularly on important organizational aspects of the group, the strategic choices they deployed, and the outcomes that resulted from them.

Parents United emerged when a prominent civil rights organization began partnering with schools in Anacostia, one of the District's lower-income and predominately African American neighborhoods. Confounded by failed attempts to desegregate the city's starkly unequal schools, the group began to explore ways of enhancing educational opportunities for the area's students. The director of the Washington Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights, Roderic Boggs, set about creating the partnership in 1978. His organization provided pro bono legal services to parent groups at local schools that had become the victims of the system's intransigence. In an interview, a parent at the time recalls an incident that demonstrated the effectiveness of the partnership with the legal advocacy group. After sending several letters alerting the administration to remove a precarious structure from the playground of her children's schools led nowhere, she contacted one of the attorneys and asked for help. To her amazement, the young lawyer "wrote a letter on his stationery and you cannot believe how quickly those folk moved" to rectify the situation.

Beyond addressing particular demands, the project sought to shift school authority away from an often unresponsive central administration, by empowering parents to play a role in school decision-making. The legal partnership grew into a project calling for "mixes of strategies" that included not just conventional legal tools, but also community education and coalition-building. It was the belief of the Lawyers' Committee, that if parents could take an active role in decision-making processes around schools, then they "could succeed where litigation had failed to ensure a minimally adequate education" (Gaffney et al. 1981, p. 13). Some members of the Lawyers' Committee, themselves public school parents in the District, began to forge relationships with parent groups living in communities that were a world apart from their own.

Soon after, in the summer of 1980, long simmering political battles over the District schools reached a fever pitch and a broader coalition of parents was formed. On the last day of school, Mayor Marion Barry announced that the District was undergoing a fiscal crisis and he targeted education for deep cuts in funding. The already underfunded school system was forced to fire over 700 teachers. The reverberations of the blow were felt in nearly every school across the city. As is true in most school districts when layoffs are undertaken, less senior teachers were the first to be dismissed. One group member recalled that the new teachers "went down like dominoes," and their departure resulted in a wave of teacher transfers as the remaining teachers were assigned to new schools. As it turned out, the crisis proved an important catalyst. A cadre of parent groups, many of whom who had watched the deterioration of public education from the sidelines, were compelled to work together by a school system that failed to meet the basic expectations of a broad swathe of the District's families.

Having worked with parent groups across the city, and himself a public school parent, Boggs and his associates were able to build a formidable alliance from the swelling outrage. Over the next few months following the mass firing, they formed Parents United, opened an office, and began to organize behind their demand to restore funding to the schools. In the fall, Parents United announced its arrival by holding its first public action during a D.C. Council hearing on the budget cuts. Five hundred chanting and sign-waving parents, students, and teachers, backed by a high school marching band and choir, rallied outside the District government offices (Richburg, 1980). Inside, members of Parents United painted a gloomy picture in their testimonies about conditions in the school district. One mother gravely warned that the city "will certainly die without decent public education", and she predicted that middle class parents would leave in search of better funded schools in the suburbs (Young, 1980). An African American parent stated that the cuts had eliminated extracurricular programs, and she described the impact as "genocidal" to the future of the city's largely minority student



population (Mercer, 1980). Though it turned out that it was too late for them to reverse the cuts, the nascent group that emerged from the financial crisis – Parents United--would go on to become the most visible and effective education advocacy group in the District for nearly two decades. Over that time period, the group found ways to play a critical role in pursuing a variety of improvements, including: introducing a full day pre-kindergarten program, extending the teacher work day, reducing class sizes, creating a regular schedule of budget hearings, increasing public education funding allocations by tens of millions of dollars, and initiating an ambitious facility improvement plan (Ogilve, 1989; Speicher, 1992; Henig et al., 1999).

Although the way Parents United articulated its mission changed over time, a few guiding principles stand out in our interviews and the organizational materials we reviewed. Central to the group's vision was the belief in working on city-wide issues that could unite the largest number of families to support improvements in public schools. This vision manifested itself in big and small ways. The group always had two co-chairs, interviewees pointed out, one African American and one white. On a protest song sheet, the group made sure to refer to the names of schools located on disparate sides of the city in their chants calling for increased education funding (Parents United, 1983-84). Their focus on creating a city-wide presence also led Parents United to become self-conscious about the privileged status of its leadership. Acknowledging that pressure for high quality education comes from the most savvy and educated residents, who are generally more privileged and white, the long-time director of Parents United posed a pointed question: "[B]ut what difference does it make?" In her opinion, "[w]hen it comes to education in the District, all of us are on the Titanic. Some of us are on the upper decks and some of us are on the lower decks, but we are all on the same sinking ship. (Havill, 1997)" As the group became stronger and more savvy it would go on to experience success in getting more money to schools and improving school facilities—two fundamental issues ostensibly with the broadest appeal. Despite these accomplishments it still faced persistent criticisms that it was too white, affluent, and removed to fairly represent the interests of an overwhelmingly African American and lower-income student population. Closer inspection of the group's activities and internal documents reveal that the leadership went to great lengths to battle this perception, through a concerted, though not entirely successful, effort to expand its reach into the communities of greatest need.

From the scattered confederation of parents that came together in 1980, Parents United developed a more formalized, though still relatively loose, city-wide organization over the following years. At its height, the group recruited parent groups as members from approximately 140 schools in all wards of the city. Though fewer members came from the lowest income neighborhoods (Boo 1990), Parents United maintained a small but

diverse leadership core that directed most of the group's decisions. Beyond the core, the leadership could call on a network of parent volunteers to show up for events, testify at hearings, help with mailings, or participate in other advocacy events when needed. The group was financed by donations from parent groups at some more affluent schools and private foundations, which provided them a degree of autonomy from the school system. Organizational budgets reveal that for the entire period when the group was at its height it operated with only one, mostly part-time, paid employee on its payroll. Yet, despite what the group lacked in funds and resources, the unique set of skills possessed by its leadership made it possible for the group to deploy powerful networks whose social and political capital was used to open doors and exert influence for the group. Although officially dissolved in 2008, members suggest that Parents United's influence had begun to fade by the start of the new millennium as funding sources began to dry up and the group experienced a transition in leadership.

6 The strategic choices of Parents United

Over the two decades following its emergence, Parents United would adapt its activities and focus to align with the evolving political context. Along the way, the group made important strategic choices around how to most effectively shape the discourse on education reform, cultivate powerful alliances, and take direct action to change education policy. Here, we highlight some of the group's most distinctive choices, and the outcomes—both good and bad—that followed from them.

6.1 Framing educational reform

Faced with dwindling funds available to schools, Parents United decided that it would have to take on the task of putting educational improvement at the top of the city government's policy agenda. The group's approach to shaping the debate on public education began with the fundamental choice of what they would call themselves. Members originally elected to call themselves "Citizens United." Upon further reflection, the group strategically re-framed themselves as "Parents United." The new name not only accurately described their membership, as group leaders pointed out, but also proclaimed that they had a personal stake in the future of public education and were not merely "do gooders." In the coming years, the newly formed Parents United would evolve into not only a darling of the media, but also the premier source for high quality research on local schools. In order to most effectively frame the need for educational reform, Parents United's targeted their efforts at reaching not only city officials responsible for public education, but also the general public.

Having been incubated within a civil rights organization, Parents United benefitted from a membership with extensive research and analytical skills. Mary Levy, a lawyer and public school parent who remains an established authority on the District's public education budget even today, was recruited as a core member of

the group early on because she had developed expertise in school finance. She authored the group's very first report in 1981 comparing education spending between the District and other neighboring school systems outside of the city. The report revealed serious disparities in per pupil funding and teacher salaries, and challenged the conventional wisdom that the District spent more on education than its neighbors. In the 1990's, the group's research would send the system reeling into crisis when school facilities surveys revealed an alarming number of fire code violations that had gone neglected for decades. It was precisely Parents United's capacity to produce expert analysis that members often highlighted as the basis for its credibility. On the occasion of the group's first 10 years of advocacy, the director of the group reflected that while indeed "[p]arents have power," it was employing the use of facts that "makes our positions unassailable (Rice-Thurston, 1990)." While much of the research reflected the high level of analytical expertise within its leadership, Parents United's data collection efforts reflected their ability to enlist extensive networks to increase transparency on critical school information. Parents, educators, and others volunteered to complete surveys disseminated by the group in order to document the quality of staffing, facilities, resources and programming at over 100 schools across the city.

An independent evaluation of the group revealed that key education stakeholders in the District—including some of Parents United's staunchest critics—all acknowledged that the group produced research far more rigorous than anything the school district itself could produce (Ogilve, 1989). In the evaluator's report, a former superintendent of the District's schools admitted that he even replaced his own budget director because his department's analysis was so lacking in comparison to the reports published by Parents United. The notorious lack of transparency in central administration consistently left them open to the critical analyses that the research conducted by Parents United generated. School leaders were publicly embarrassed in education hearings on numerous occasions when they were unable to cite basic information on how many employees were on the system's payroll or how many students were enrolled (Sutner, 1992; Strauss & Loeb, 1998). Because the political establishment was unwilling or unable to produce research of equal caliber to Parents United, the role for an independent, citizen and parent-led research and data gathering effort became all the more vital in shaping education decision-making.

Although the research reports produced by Parents United gained credibility with authorities for their analytical expertise, they were often inaccessible to those outside the policy realm. Because school-level data was often inaccessible to the general public, the group also attempted to empower parents with research they could use to advocate for their particular school's needs as well. But to draw broader media attention to the state of the public schools as well enthusiasm from

concerned parents, one member recalls regularly devising new "gimmicks" to find ways to draw media attention to the state of the public schools as well enthusiasm from concerned parents. Inviting news crews in to film the conditions in dilapidated schools always made for "great TV," one member recalled. Images of leaky roofs and filthy bathrooms served to shame officials responsible for such school blight. The group regularly appeared in news articles of the time, and when not directly quoted, Parents United members contributed numerous opinion articles to local papers to share their perspective on schools. Like any reputable advocacy group of the day, they also published a newsletter, which was mailed out to at least 3,000 people (Speicher, 1992), though others estimated much more. Their aggressive media and outreach strategy positioned Parents United to become a vital voice in discussions about public education.

Underlying their attempts to shape the discourse on education reform in the District, Parents United was committed to reversing the common narrative that schools failed because of the deficiencies of students served. A good illustration of this can be found in the group's issuance of semi-annual annual "report cards." Designed to mirror those that students receive, Parents United's report cards were released to much fanfare and graded the mayor's progress based on school surveys detailing a wide array of personnel, resource, and facilities criteria. In 1987, for example, the mayor's report card was littered with failing grades and in place of a teacher's signature, it was symbolically signed by "John and Mary D.C. Public" (Parents United, 1987a). Such framing activities positioned public officials as those failing the schools, not students or their families, and reminded the city's leaders that they were being held accountable.

Because of its ability to carry out research, and its ability to make its findings accessible to the broader public, Parents United became a major player in shaping education discourse in the District. Ultimately, however, group members also cautioned the limits of what its framing activities could achieve. As one member pointed out, reports and data were only good as "backup," and that the hard work of organizing and advocacy would have to provide the true impetus for driving systemic change to the city's schools.

6.2 Building relationships for educational change

In a 1997 newspaper profile of Parents United's long-time director, Delabian Rice-Thurston, the author notes that in a city with quaking racial and class fault lines, she could "go anywhere and talk to anybody." An African American woman married to a white public school teacher, the author suggests that Rice-Thurston's appeal was "ambiracial." She could have a "great deal of impact" in the city's wealthiest wards, and in the city's poorest, could appear as "the local black icon" who made the school system "backpedal and the *Washington Post* kiss her butt in search of another good quote" (Havill

1997). Other group members recall Rice-Thurston's frequent trips to community meetings at schools scattered across the city with sign-in sheets in hand, and the long hours she logged on telephone calls attempting to recruit members to testify at hearings. Flipping through the pages of the numerous black leather-bound diaries she filled during her time as director, one can get a sense of the network she helped build in the pursuit of educational equity. Entries in the diaries detail school visits, meetings with parents, conversations with educators, interactions with public officials, and phone numbers for journalists and business people she came in contact with. These aspects of Rice-Thurston's work as director reflect the unique art of relationship-building at the heart of community organizing. In its nearly two decade reign, Parents United would always struggle with this component of their work. But the group's attempts at relationship-building in a divided city offer important lessons for those concerned with promoting educational equity.

According to notes from an internal focus group, Parents United was well aware that it often represented "the voice of a relatively small number of particularly well-educated or concerned parents" and that the vast majority of parents were uninvolved even in their own schools, let alone city-wide advocacy groups (Parents United, 1993-1994). While the group did at times characterize lower-income public school parents as "apathetic" or "hopeless" in some documents, Parents United leadership were deeply conscious of the institutional barriers that systemic poverty posed to many of the District's residents (Parents United, 1987b). In a city where the public school population was largely lower-income and African American, building a base of support was both important in principle and for strategic purposes. In order to bridge the gaps between parents of diverse backgrounds, the group engaged the business community to meet the immediate needs of lower-income students and their schools. As a result, founders of Parents United formed a sister organization, the Washington Parent Group Fund, which was designed to bring resources into the city's poorest schools to fund enrichment programs. Through corporate and foundation support, the Fund offered thousands of dollars in matching grants to projects at over 30 high-need schools. The creators of the Fund knew that while affluent parents supplemented funds in their own schools, lower-income communities could not contribute similar amounts (White, 1993). The relationship between the groups was envisioned as "symbiotic" and synergistic; the Fund would bring in constituencies from some of the poorest schools in the District and Parents United would then be able to learn about their concerns and potentially enlist them as advocates (Parents United 1987b). Members recall that whereas Parents United may have at times been seen as a nuisance to entrenched public officials, the Fund enjoyed universal acceptance and praise. Through their involvement, parents in lower income areas claimed that they were

able to shed the "stigma" that they were inactive or apathetic (Valente 1982). High-level recognition and support for the Fund streamed in from major newspapers, the school system's superintendent, the then-Vice President's wife, Barbara Bush, and the Ford Foundation, which identified the group as an exemplar for corporate involvement in public education (Robinson 1981, Parents United 1984).

Aside from writing checks, the Fund, along with Parents United, established a series of free workshops under their Parent Training Institute. The programming was designed not only to train parents to support students academically, but also to become advocates for them through workshops devoted to leadership, civic responsibility, and public engagement (Parents United, 1994). Additionally, the group would hold town hall meetings and other public forums where community members could discuss educational issues of the day. Beyond providing training, Parents United also rewarded their most active members. In their annual "Parent Advocacy Awards" ceremony, the group presented awards to individuals and to schools that had taken an active role at public hearings, attended public forums, or participated in other community events (Parents United 1996-1997). Based on the lists of awardees, those with the highest accolades, unsurprisingly, came from some of the most affluent neighborhoods in the District. Nonetheless, the group's activities reflect an intentional focus on building parent networks and leadership, rather than just mobilizing parents to merely show up at rallies or hearings.

What emerged from these various efforts, an interviewee reflected, was the marriage of the resources and political capital of privileged parents with the "common sense" of those lower-income families whose children experienced the most challenging schooling conditions. But as the years wore on, Parents United grew ever more aware of the difficulties in maintaining such an alliance. The group initiated its Enrichment/ Accountability Project to help build capacity of parent groups in several low-income areas. But according to organizational documents, the group made only meager progress towards their goal of training a new batch of parent leaders, citing issues with school leadership and lapses in communication. To address the unique needs of lower-income communities, Parents United applied for funding to add an organizer to their staff who could spend the extra time required to build capacity there (Parents United, 1987b). However, such a position was never added, and over time, group members reported being hesitant to plan large public events because they feared that their credibility might be damaged if they "called a demonstration and nobody came" (Henig et. al 1999). An evaluation of the organization suggested that in order for it to become more viable and shed the gloss of being an "elite" group, Parents United would need to get more single, low-income, and African American parents involved (Ogilve, 1989). Years later, one member reevaluated her role as a leader in the group and found that



"the biggest limitation was getting parents organized to be active, politically active." However, these goals remain elusive for both much more well resourced government agencies as well as grassroots activists that attempt to engage the broader public in deliberations and input processes in education policy (Orr & Rogers, 2011). Despite their consciousness of the educational experiences of marginalized communities, Parents United did at times lack the organizational capacity to continue building a city-wide movement.

In terms of relationships with key education decision-makers, Parents United leaders decided early on that they would adopt a stance towards the school system that one member described as being "critical friends," as opposed to "friendly critics." In that role, they would not position themselves as an outsider group, but rather as insiders with a stake in supporting improvements in the school system. In the beginning, group members recall that much of city government was unsympathetic to their efforts. Over time, the group would cultivate stronger relationships with some high-level school officials, including superintendents and School Board members. Parents United often invited these officials as guests to their events, and the school system in turn invited Parents United as a key stakeholder to participate in its various task-forces or to assist in conducting parent trainings.

Of the various arms of government that exercised responsibility over public education, it was the elected School Board that proved to be most open to the advocacy of Parents United and the body on which they relied most. Parents United was a ubiquitous presence at the community meetings the School Board held several times a year, and helped turn out larger crowds to testify as well. Additionally, the School Board often found itself on the side of Parents United when taking on other branches of government. When the group brought suit against the mayor for slashing the school budget in 1983, they did so with the School Board accompanying them as plaintiffs in the case (White, 1983). The group's access to the School Board proved to have important advantages. Over the years, Parents United was successful in propelling four of their former leaders into elected seats on the School Board, deepening the group's reach further into the educational establishment. But as mentioned above, the School Board was also an embattled institution, often viewed by others in the establishment as incompetent or intransigent. In the 1990's, the D.C. Council and other District leaders regularly called to dissolve or drastically reduce the power of the School Board (Figueroa, 1992; Koklanaris, 1995). Parents United stood by the Board through these attacks, despite the fact they often publicly criticized its many failures and proclivity to finger-pointing. During one such episode, the group's newsletter clearly pronounced that "parental pressure on the School Board is the best motivator for achieving good schools" (Rice-Thurston, 1994, p. 3).

The group also experienced considerable friction with the political establishment. Some School Board members reported that they found Parents United members were too pushy and combative (O'Hanlon, 1994), with one former representative bitterly observing that the group didn't "just want to suggest policy, they want to make it" (Boo, 1990, p.17). Also, due to the group's almost singular focus on increasing school budgets meant they were at times perceived as being less critical of the system's inefficiencies, and may have lost credibility in the eyes of some government officials (Ogilve, 1989). Depending on how well they served the group's interests, Parents United at different times openly defended some superintendents and tried to prevent them from being terminated, while quietly supporting the removal of others (Henig et al., 1999). One system leader stands out for his particularly hostile stance towards Parents United, and public engagement more generally. When Congress took control of the city and its schools in 1996, they signaled that they were declaring war on the intransigent system by placing a retired army general named Julius Becton at the helm. Becton, whom interviewees referred to as an uncompromising and aggressive educational administrator, regularly clashed with Parents United over school facilities issues. His uncompromising approach turned out to be his undoing. Just 16 months after being appointed, he resigned citing fractious politics and lamenting the combative stance to public engagement that characterized his tenure. "If I had one silver bullet," the general reflected at a news conference announcing his departure, "it would be greater parental and community involvement" (Strauss & Loeb, 1998). Whether friend or foe, the group was generally regarded by decision-makers as a force to be reckoned with in the District's education politics.

Fashioning a vast web of relationships in spite of various setbacks and shortcomings, Parents United managed to link business leaders, public officials, legal advocates, and a wide base of public school parents. The broad alliance was critical in supporting Parents United's aims of organizing and advocacy, and was based on the group's focus on issues of city-wide significance. How the group mobilized these networks into action would end up having a significant impact upon schools for years to come.

6.3 Taking action for educational change

Although it gained recognition as an erudite and savvy citizen lobby that carefully examined school budgets and data, Parents United was also known to take direct action through demonstrations, advocacy, and litigation to support its aim of improving schools for all students. During its periods of most intense activity, the group would exert public pressure by amassing sizable and clamorous public demonstrations and rallies when the need arose. For example, at a 1986 rally, 3,000 supporters gathered at District offices and released hundreds of green balloons meant to symbolize their demand to increase public education funding (Sargent,



LaFraniere, 1986). When the Mayor cut school funding by \$45 million three years later, the group brought together parents, educators, and students from 71 schools to hold a 25-day vigil outside his office calling for the return of the funds (Sanchez, 1989; Parents United, 1990). At the conclusion of the vigil, when the mayor's staff handed out fliers disputing Parents United's claims, demonstrators defiantly tore them up and chanted, "No more lies!" (Sherwood 1989). While these demonstrations were an important indication of their mobilization capacity, and the extent of confrontational tactics they were willing to utilize, it was Parents United's advocacy and litigation work that truly made their presence felt throughout the system.

Parents United utilized nearly all opportunities to influence schools through formal channels. The group regularly testified at public hearings on education and publicized such opportunities to their membership. One member claimed that in their early days, parents maintained either a rare or timid presence at School Board meetings and other hearings. However, as the strength and influence of Parents United grew, the concerns of parents were less easily dismissed. For many years, the group provided members with handbooks containing advice on how to frame their testimony for maximum impact, contact information for authorities in the school system who could address their particular issues, and even phone numbers of media outlets listed under the heading, "When all else fails" (Parents United, 1993).

While most of its advocacy efforts surrounded defending school budgets against pervasive cuts, Parents United also managed to set an important precedent to the school budget approval process itself. According to former members, the chaotic and shadowy process often forced parents to show up to last minute budget hearings that ran late into the night. In the hopes of achieving greater transparency and broader public participation, Parents United developed a petition that declared public education funding a matter of highest priority, and also outlined a budget approval process that included a regular schedule for community input and a system of accountability across branches of the government (Boggs & Toyer, 1987). After gathering more than 21,000 petition signatures and gaining backing from nearly all local elected officials, Parents United managed to pass a school support ballot initiative in 1987 with overwhelming support from the District's general electorate (Parents United, 1990; Fisher, 1987). The grassroots campaign serves as a clear display of the group's political muscle and ability to present issues in a manner that garnered broad appeal.

As a public school advocacy group hatched out of a civil rights organization, Parents United ultimately returned to its roots and played to its strength of using the courts to force change through a recalcitrant system. Though they saw legal action as a method of last resort for improving schools in the District, litigation also proved a more effective strategy than holding rallies or demon-

strations, one member explained. But the wider reaching--and unintended--impact of some of their legal efforts also provided fodder for their staunchest critics. The complications of legal advocacy were dramatically displayed through the group's school facilities campaign. After spending years exhaustively documenting leaking roofs and rotting windows, Parents United obtained a government report citing over 11,000 fire code violations in schools across the city (Duggan, 1994). The group used the alarming findings to lobby city officials for repairs. Finding their concerns repeatedly brushed aside, they ultimately filed a lawsuit in 1992 to force the school district to take action. Two years later, a judge ruled in favor of Parents United, handing down a mandate that the school system would have to complete repairs before students returned to school after summer vacation. But the judge took a particularly uncompromising position on the repairs, and as a result, the system decided to continue delaying re-opening schools by several weeks each school year over the following three years. In addition to the general public outcry around the delays, the repair orders had divergent impacts on schools. One school for example, serving primarily lower-income and recent immigrant students, faced serious disruptions in instruction as educators were forced to re-locate their students between five different locations. The principal of the school wrote that while she felt Parents United had a "sincere desire" to repair crumbling school buildings, their decision to pursue the suit was not done in consultation with parents and "did not reflect firsthand understanding of the complexities the day-to-day operations in a school" (Tukeva, 1997). In the public spotlight, Parents United endured even harsher criticism. At one hearing, Parents United members were met with school officials chanting, "shame on you!" for refusing to drop the protracted suit, and city leaders fanned tensions by suggesting "monied interests" were behind the suit (Strauss, 1997). Rice-Thurston, voiced her bewilderment at the blowback from the court case, saying that "[w]e had no idea... [T]hat's one of the things we've learned—unfortunately, to our chagrin—about going to court. You never know what's going to happen" (O'Hanlon, 1994).

Additionally, the lawsuit had a hand in driving turnover in the school system's leadership—including one of Parents United's key allies. Because they were unable to effectively resolve the issues of building repairs that kept schools closed, two school leaders were fired or resigned (Henig et al., 1999). Amidst public pressure and the threat of a continued school lockout, Parents United chose to dismiss the suit and reached a settlement that would keep schools open and institute a plan for monitoring and funding facility repairs. While repairs would still take a long time to sort out, the stormy conflict helped put the crumbling state of schools—and ineffective bureaucracy overseeing them—at the center of public debate. A principal of an elementary school suggested that Parents United had "made a fabulous advancement in oversight for the school system... So

many eyes and ears are watching that they really don't need to be fearful that we will slip back to where we used to be" (Wilgoren 1997). But after the dust had settled on the fire code controversy, Parents United would never again capture the city's attention—or outrage—with the same intensity through their advocacy efforts.

7 Discussion

The case of Parents United offers important lessons for those interested in the role that public engagement can play in supporting sustainable education reform. In this section, we draw from these lessons and the experiences of Parents United to better understand the prospects for education advocacy in light of recent changes in the political and social context of American cities like the District.

7.1 Finding new advocacy pathways

The civic landscape in which Parents United had come to maneuver so effectively has since been significantly altered. Following the path of other large urban systems like Chicago and New York, the District instituted mayoral control over public schools in 2007. City leaders around the country have similarly sought to centralize education authority in the executive office of the mayor, typically at the expense of locally elected school boards which are dissolved or whose power is significantly reduced (Kirst & Wirt, 2009). The District's transition to mayoral control reversed earlier trends towards decentralization, and eliminated one of Parents United's key allies, the elected School Board. Research indicates that while centralizing education authority may position mayors to better leverage civic partnerships to support education reform (Wong et al., 2007), it can also create decision-making structures that are perceived as less responsive to the concerns of low-income communities of color (Chambers, 2006). The implementation of mayoral control in the District was met with considerable public outcry (Hannaway & Usdan, 2008), and subsequent polls have shown that school system leadership has polarized public support in recent years (Turque & Cohen, 2010). The new governance structure has been the subject of public scrutiny for the degree of oversight and accountability it has provided (National Research Council, 2011; Catania, 2014). The new decision-making configuration, while more centralized, has not necessarily led to greater coordination between the various agencies entrusted with overseeing public education. With the dissolution of the School Board, there have been fewer official and consistent channels parents can engage or allies to cultivate in the political leadership. Former Parents United leaders observe clear changes in how the system deals with families and communities. One interviewee shared that, "[s]ince mayoral control, there is less wisdom operating at high levels in the school systems" and that the leadership has only begun to take the role of parents and communities more seriously. She went on to say that "public engagement, like a lot of

things has to be intentional" and systematic, it cannot simply become a "byproduct of the education process." Guidelines for evaluating public engagement under mayoral control remain somewhat unclear and inconsistent. For example, the school system has received recognition for its attempts to engage communities through online platforms (Committee on the Independent Evaluation of DC Public Schools, 2011), even though they are out of reach for many of the city's lower-income public school families. District leaders have still not developed a broader and more consistent range of measures to create a school system that is responsive to public engagement.

Pathways for public engagement are also shifting as school choice has fundamentally transformed the political context. With Parents United fading in influence by the late 1990's, a new thrust in education reform was beginning to dominate education policy agendas. School system leaders at that time began to float proposals to privatize the management of some schools, and the city's first charter schools opened their doors in 1996. The aggravation stemming from sluggish improvements in the city's schools turned segments of the advocacy community towards charter alternatives. Parents United itself, while acknowledging the public outcry over privatization, also voiced tentative support for contracting out management of some schools (Parents United, 1993; Parents United, 1994b). One of the group's most powerful allies, a business-led advisory committee on the District's schools, grew restless with the slow pace of reform and began to devote its efforts to the growing charter movement (Henig et al., 1999). Charter schools, as one interviewee explained, opened up the possibility that "people don't have to stick around and beat their heads against the wall trying to get something changed." Since that time, charters have grown at a feverish pace, and now enroll 43% of public school students in the District—the third highest percentage in the nation (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2013). In a population almost evenly split between charter and traditional public schools that are administered under bifurcated governance structures, it is difficult to develop a coherent strategy that can target the appropriate decision-makers. It remains to be seen whether the District will follow the path of other cities in America, where rival parent and community groups have sprung up to promote competing agendas, resulting in a civic landscape characterized by a zero-sum competition between charter or traditional public school advocates (Pappas, 2012).

In addition to creating a new public school sector with a separate governance structure, the push for school choice has carried other implications for public engagement in the District. As a result of the proliferation of charters and other measures intended to guarantee students access to higher quality schooling options, only 25% of District students now attend the schools assigned to them based on their residence (21st Century Schools Fund, 2013a). The greater mobility has



served to fan students across the District, rendering the link between school and geographic community more tenuous. The diffusion of students however has not translated into significantly more racially or socio-economically integrated schools, as a 2010 report found that at least 90% of the District's African American charter students attended intensely segregated schools (Frankeberg et al., 2010). Given the high level of student mobility and persisting segregation, the pursuit of city-wide advocacy rooted in neighborhood schools in the model of Parents United would be an uphill climb for community members today. To overcome the diffusion of parents and students, alternative configurations of collective action may play a bigger role, such as social media-based activism (Heron-Huby & Landon-Hays, 2014). And while education organizers and parent leaders have become adept at using platforms like Twitter, these new forms of activism cannot replace the need for intentional relationship-building in establishing more powerful public engagement platforms.

7.2 Maintaining a focus on equity

The strategic choices made by Parents United leaders reflect an activism rooted in an equity framework. Although Parents United was a city-wide group, the leadership grounded itself in the needs of the city's most marginalized communities and took intentional steps to collectively build parent power. Maintaining an equity-based approach to education advocacy should remain an important guiding principle for community members as the District changes from a national symbol of urban decline to a case study of urban transformation. Once proudly anointed as "Chocolate City" by its majority African American residents in earlier decades, the District's African American population dropped from 70% in 1980 to 51% in 2010 (Urban Institute, 2010). These changes in racial composition are accompanied by important socioeconomic changes as well. The District now has the third highest income gap of large cities across America between its richest and poorest residents (Biegler 2012). The school system has been working to court recently arrived and middle class parents, and have focused on building families' confidence in enrolling in the public schools. To this end, the District has widely trumpeted improvements in test scores, undertaken extensive school facility renovation and construction projects, and expanded specialized program offerings (Barras, 2010; Brown, 2013a; Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2013). Some politicians and analysts, however, have pointed out that the celebrated test scores and graduation gains must be placed within the context of shifting demographic changes and examined when disaggregated across the city's diverse student population (Catania, 2014; Smarick, 2013; Nichols, 2014; Brown, 2013b). In order for public engagement to play a constructive role in the future of the District's schools, community leaders and city officials must ensure that attempts to solicit community input are representative of the city as a whole.

Furthermore, parent and education groups must find ways to integrate education advocacy within broader conversations regarding rapid changes and growing inequality in the city, such as debates over affordable housing. If education is dealt with in isolation, then education leaders run the risk of furthering growing disparities and policies that disproportionately impact lower-income communities.

7.3 Diversifying strategy

As became evident over two decades of intense advocacy, Parents United's campaigns required an ever expanding toolbox of strategies to respond to the systemic issues underlying urban school reform. They testified before government bodies as often as possible, took the city to court on several occasions, caught the attention of the media when they wanted to expose particular injustices, and turned out large numbers of supporters whenever they could. The need for a diversified set of strategies continues to be evident for community groups today, especially as the civic landscape of public education becomes increasingly polarized. In the current period, few education issues seem to have the same universal appeal as adequate funding did when Parents United was most active. Education is now squarely on the radar of city politicians, and the District ranks third among large urban school systems in the highest figures of unadjusted per pupil education funding (Cornman et al., 2013). Additionally, with school choice as a central component of the current reform agenda, parent leaders and activists face a particularly difficult challenge in how to best frame their concerns. Few issues have proven to have the same capacity to polarize and entrench opposing camps with divergent views of education reform as school choice (Scott, 2012; Stulberg, 2008). In a recent set of focus groups conducted by the city, District parents voiced concerns that school choice and competition has led to too much uncertainty and a lack of investment in neighborhood schools (21st Century Schools Fund, 2014). With a wedge firmly dividing the governance of charter and traditional public school sectors, community groups can fashion a "bottom-up" agenda for how the divided system may increase collaboration and turn down the heat on school competition.

Diversifying the approach to education reform may also mean expanding the constituency of education stakeholders and finding new opportunities for coalition. While groups like Parents United have historically been focused on mobilizing parents as a vital constituency, urban America has seen a recent proliferation of youth and student-led organizing and advocacy groups as well (Delgado & Staples, 2008; Mediratta et al., 2009). These groups are often allied with other community and parent groups, but uniquely recognize the "expertise" that students gain from their direct experiences in schools themselves (Su, 2009; Mitra, 2008). Additionally, because the political context of public education is shaped in large part by federal-level mandates, there are



more opportunities for national networks of education groups to develop coalitions that share similar political agendas (Wells et al., 2011).

In closing, given the drastic changes to the civic landscape of public education in the District, new forms of public engagement will continue to evolve that address emerging challenges and opportunities. Newcomers to the city, as well as new generations of school reformers, should not take the current schooling context for granted. Instead, they should recognize that the present state of urban school systems is the byproduct of a complicated social and political legacy in which a host of different stakeholders have played a part. Understanding this history is crucial given the constant churn of new reforms that have historically swept the District and urban school systems more generally. Too often, one interviewee stated, new school system leaders would arrive in the District and “throw out everything that was there,” prompting Parents United to propose the motto, “We are not a blank slate!” The history of Parents United clearly demonstrates that the District is not just a blank slate in need of a new package of heavy-handed reforms. Instead, school leaders should recognize parents, students, and community members as partners and build public engagement platforms that can support more sustainable reforms. While much has changed since the group’s decline, their dynamic approach to education organizing and advocacy is still relevant to the challenges that persist in America’s urban schools today.

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Endnotes

¹The struggles over "home rule" and statehood have sought to address the fact that several important aspects of governance in the District have been controlled by members of Congress who are not elected by local residents, and the lack of local representation at the federal level. For a discussion of the history of the fight for home rule see: Fauntroy, Michael. 2003. Home rule or house rule?: Congress and the erosion of local governance in the District of Columbia. Lanham: University Press of America.

Review of the Book

Glenn Laverack, *Health Activism: Foundations and Strategies*

London: Sage, 2013, 175 pages (Pbk), Price: £23.99,
ISBN 9781446249659.

This is a very interesting and valuable book in which Glenn Laverack draws from his long experience of activism in a variety of contexts. The author is senior research fellow at Flinders University, described as a “world leader in health promotion and empowerment” with experience around the world including WHO and who is now based in Australia.

He explains that: “Activism is action on behalf of a cause, action that goes beyond what is conventional or routine and is relative to the actions by others” (p.1). Throughout he gives a clear account of what is involved and why activism is important. At the end of the book he summarises:

What is clear is that if we do not challenge top down programming, individualism, corporations and complacent governments, we will continue to have limited success in improving people’s lives and health. The way forward for activists is not a revolutionary reorientation of the way they work but an acceptance of activism as a legitimate approach in the way we deliver health programming. Health activism offers an alternative way forward at a time when innovative ideas are lacking in practice. The extent to which this happens will depend on our willingness to engage with activists and to work with them to address the causes of social injustice and health inequalities in society (p.145).

The book is aimed at a wide audience but “it has particular relevance for postgraduate students and practitioners in public health and health promotion”. It is not a textbook but it has the feel of a primer or guide. There are 10 chapters beginning with foundations of health activism, and covering contexts and strategies (including international issues) before moving to the work of an individual activist in community and other settings and using particular approaches and skills such as those involving ‘new’ media and ending with some speculations about the future. Throughout all chapters there are clearly outlined frameworks that encompass activism as, for example, direct or indirect, relating to hard or soft power etc. He usefully suggests that context is important and that at times it may be necessary to determine that certain forms of activity are actually rather simple forms of routine engagement as opposed

to activism. “Activism” he argues “has a specific role to empower others” (p. 2). He builds a good case for a rational approach in which: “The strength of activist organisations lies less in numbers and more in assets such as strong leadership, evidence backed positions, good media relations a network of strategic alliances with other groups the ability to use multiple strategies organisational structures and sufficient independent financial resources” (p. 33).

This straightforward approach is very welcome. He argues that activists need to be clear about they are doing and he certainly achieves that in his well-organised writing. His explanations are enriched by many interesting case studies.

I would have welcomed (as might be imagined from this theme of this special issue of JSSE) slightly more explicit consideration of the different possibilities associated with activism. In particular what is the role for education in relation to activism? Do we find that the process of activism is itself educational and, if so, how does that occur? Does it matter who takes part and what are the patterns that show engagement by different groups for different goals? What about the unintended consequences of activism? Are there new forms of citizenship that might emerge from particular approaches to activism as well as useful ways to engage people in the achievement of worthwhile goals? If activism is contextually specific and may be classified in some cases as ‘simple’ engagement, then is it possible for some people to be marginalised and/or included as key decision makers through their activism?

The above questions and comments will not, I would imagine, present any difficulties for Laverack. I suspect that his experience and clear sightedness will enable him to deal confidently with such matters. This book is aimed at a particular audience and does a very good job in its own terms. He has already dealt with all the above issues at least implicitly. I hope to look forward to other publications that probe (in, potentially, a more confusing way) some of the highly complex issues around activism.

This is a good book that will be of value to many.

Ian Davies,
University of York, United Kingdom



Review of the Book

Ali A. Abdi and Paul R. Carr (Eds.), *Educating for Democratic Consciousness: Counter-Hegemonic Possibilities*

New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2013
ISBN 978-1-4331-1711-4 (Hdc)
ISBN 978-1-4331-1710-7 (Pbk)

Perhaps there is no term used as frequently as a means for moral suasion than “democracy”. In 2014 alone, university students in Hong Kong demonstrated en masse against limits imposed on their federal voting rights in “democracy protests”. Analysts in the United Kingdom hailed the outcome of the Scottish referendum on independence as an exemplary of “democracy-at-work”. The US-led coalition assembled to attack the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) justified its actions at least in part as a restoration of democracy to the region. Democracy can mean many things, but its default definition as freedom with intermittent electoral procedures is what is largely produced for and consumed by citizens in the Western mainstream. Vested interests invoke this perspective of as a means to further entrench the status quo, as this hegemonic construction ensures that powers rest in power, albeit risking severe consequences. As Noam Chomsky argued in 2003, the maintenance of hegemony threatens our very survival.

The writers of *Education for Democratic Consciousness: Counter-Hegemonic Possibilities* demarcate alternatives to this mainstream stance of democracy, standpoints exemplified by resistance, reactions, and substitutes to hegemony. The title of the book itself signifies its point of departure by a tip of the hat to Paulo Freire, describing education as an exercise in broadening consciousness. The editors, Ali A. Abdi and Paul R. Carr, are themselves known both for their contributions to citizenship and democratic education in Canada, and as critical counter-hegemonic pedagogues. Abdi’s influence is visible in the vision for the book, as it extends from his scholarship on global citizenship education, decolonizing perspectives on democracy and human rights, and education and social development in the Global South. Carr’s imprint can be seen through the contestations of democracy as simply a formal, political, and electoral system. Elsewhere he has drawn the distinction between “thin” conceptualizations of democracy that are proliferated in the mainstream as largely an act of voting, and “thick” conceptualizations that actively recruit important intersections with democracy such as race, peace, and the environment (Carr, 2011). Together the editors have assembled a rich volume of contemporary thought on

democracy and education from Canadian and international perspectives.

Following an opening triad of chapters by the editors that set a conceptual departure point, the book meanders through a breadth of perspectives on democracy and education emanating from around the globe and from disciplinary perspectives. The contributions made by this book are its creative extensions of theory, its analyses of democracy and education in various nation-states, and its vivid illustrations of practices of democracy in education, including the classroom. Although not clearly delineated by these sections, the book could very well be broken down accordingly.

Chapter authors such as George J. Sefa Dei, Dennis Carlson, Peter Pericles Trifonas, M. Ayaz Naseem & Adeela Arshad-Ayaz, Randy Hoover and Noah De Lissovoy extend the theoretical boundaries of democracy, analyzing their impact on education. In chapter 4, Dei explores how indigenous knowings can reposition the very discourse of democratic education. In chapter 8, Carlson draws on the poststructuralist Marxist theory of Empire to examine how the multitude is the primary site of resistance against capitalism, a foundation for hope of Derrida’s “democracy to come”. Trifonas also relies on Derrida in chapter 10 as he examines the inherent tensions in creating democratic spaces in colonized locations of Western knowledge. For Naseem and Arshad-Ayaz in chapter 11, it is Galtung’s theories of Imperialism that are used on to dissect neo-liberal and knowledge imperialism in the internationalization and transnationalization of education. And in chapter 15, De Lissovoy outlines a new theoretical stance that proposes a redefining of democracy to encapsulate the nature of simply “being together.”

Numerous authors—Ranilce Guimarães-Iosif, Pierre Orelus, Lynette Schultz, William M. Reynolds, Angela Stienen, Carl E. James, and Vicki Macris—highlight the tensions between state-level representations of democracy and the framing of democracy within their formal education curricula. These are some of the most interesting contributions of the book for their international and comparative value. Guimarães-Iosif (chapter 5) and Orelus (chapter 6) focus on Latin



America, respectively: Brazil a “democratic state”, but one that insufficiently incorporates democracy in the education system to meet the democratic expectations for society; and Haiti, where regardless of the models of democracy integrated in formal education, the instructional language of French ensures the continued marginalization of the overwhelming majority of first-language Creole speakers. Schultz (chapter 7) and Reynolds (chapter 14) use contemporary cultural illustrations from the United States, the exemplar of Occupy Wall Street as a democratic instance demonstrating greater possibilities for “full and equitable citizenship”, and the impact of the widespread, uncritical reading of blockbuster feature films on counter-hegemonic democratic possibilities, respectively. Stienen and James (chapter 17) and Macris (chapter 18) look at examples in Europe. The former examines the tenuous links between multiculturalism and democracy in Switzerland (comparing them with those in Canada), and the latter focuses on pre-debt-crisis Greece and its issues of immigration, expressions of citizenship, and their parallels with societies outside Greece.

A third group of writers contribute chapters that envision hands-on, counter-hegemonic possibilities in teaching, pedagogy, and the classroom, such as Michael O’Sullivan, Gina Thésée, Randy Hoover, Kristina R. Llewellyn and Joel Westheimer. In chapter 12, O’Sullivan presents a case study of a school where teachers quite inadvertently resist anti-intellectual, neoliberal, and hegemonic approaches to democracy when they incorporate global citizenship education into their curriculum. Thésée, in chapter 13, could be read as a response to O’Sullivan, purporting democracy as the tool for resisting tyranny. Her pedagogical contribution is the outline of an epistemological base for democracy, encouraging action: to refuse, requisite, redefine, and reaffirm. In chapter 9, Hoover invokes the philosophy of experiential education, proposing the classroom as the optimal space to experiment with democracy. But as a “messy and imprecise” exercise, student achievement would need reconceptualising as, for one, learners would necessarily experience different democratic outcomes. The importance of focusing on learners’ perspectives is a theme that is also supported by Llewellyn and Westheimer who argue in chapter 16 that youth have “civic assets”, commitment to their communities, and democratic experiences that establish a foundation for civic education that is too infrequently recognized by democratic educators.

What bind the contributions are the authors’ starting point that hegemonic education must be challenged. They attend to issues of those students that do not benefit from status quo education, and investigate the hidden curricula that perpetuate this status quo. Yet given the breadth of topics and disparate approaches taken up in this book, it may also seem that the writings are dislocated and unrelated. Certainly these various contributions of theory, national examples, and classroom case studies would be difficult for purposes of

generalization or cross-national comparison. Among these readings, the notion of democracy is considerably stretched, even contradicted, with far reaching associations and applications.

But that’s entirely the point. Mainstream democracy continues to be represented in harmfully narrow terms. Hegemonic education perpetuates these constructions without meaningful opportunities for learners to critically engage. The counter-hegemonic perspectives of Education for Democratic Consciousness serve to disrupt the normative representations of democracy in education. It is our job as educators to explore and extend these theories and experiment with democratic possibilities in sites of learning.

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