Youth Activism, engagement and the development of new civic learning spaces: an overview of literature reviews.

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Abstract

In this paper we provide an overview of the literature reviews that have been completed during the Leverhulme Trust funded project ‘Youth activism, engagement and the development of new civic learning spaces’. Following a summary of the aims and methods of the project, we provide contextual details about our participating countries and discuss key issues that highlight the nature of the relationship between youth activism, engagement and education highlighting the new civic learning spaces that are developing and speculating on what we feel are new opportunities.

The Project

The project took place between 2016 and 2019. Funded by the Leverhulme Trust, it was an international network project which involved seminars, conferences, public events, as well as a significant amount of dialogue within the project team and with many individuals and groups. Our work centered on the following 4 questions:

• How do young people, their educators and policy makers understand and construct their civic activism, including different forms, spaces, expectations, aims, and learning and teaching processes?

• What are the mobilizing factors and inhibitors of such engagement?
• What are the educational benefits and drawbacks of young people’s civic activism principally regarding identity, capacity and efficacy for individual and social benefit from the local to the global?
• What educational processes are apt for optimising the educational benefits of young people’s civic activism?

Our 6 countries

The central project team was made up of colleagues who were based in, or had considerable experience and expertise in relation to, Australia, Canada, England, Hungary, Lebanon and Singapore. None of our countries represent a type but are important as individual sites and as a means to reflect more generally. Those countries were chosen in order to allow for a variety of experience in relation to the key themes of the project. This experience relates principally to 3 areas: differing political philosophies that drive engagement in different locations by different groups; the means of engagement that are practised in different locations for different purposes; and the types of education that are available in the different locations and the ways in which they are (or are not) congruent with civic activism and engagement. In order to explore commonalities and differences we have included North America, Australasia, Europe and the Middle East. The project team was assembled due to its relevant methodological expertise. Within the group there are experts in qualitative and quantitative analysis across local, national and international comparative contexts.

The variation in our sample mentioned above can be unpacked a little. There were 3 large countries (Great Britain: 67 million; Canada: 36 million; Australia: 23 million) and 3 small
Hungary: 9.8 million; Lebanon: 6.6 million; Singapore: 5.5 million). 4 are economically affluent (UK, Canada, Australia), 1 less so (Hungary) and 1 with significant levels of differentiation and deprivation (Lebanon has the 3rd highest levels of wealth inequality in the world). Lebanon and Singapore are characterized more by collectivist orientations to citizenship than the 4 other countries. Hungary is less ethnically diverse than the others and across the countries there is a range of issues relevant to the establishment and celebration of indigienity and multiculturalism. Australia has recently officially recognized first nations. While Canada has had a strong emphasis on citizens’ rights and freedoms (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982; the Canadian Multicultural Act, 1988), it continues to work on strengthening the collective rights with its Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit). In Lebanon there are 18 recognized religious sects (3 major sects of Maronite Christian, Sunni Muslim and Shia Muslim). Patterns of social and political stability vary. Hungary’s transition from socialism in 1989 and Lebanon’s sectarianism and civil wars (with over 1.5 million Syrian refugees) indicate higher levels of disruption than seen in the other countries. In such a varied and particularised sample we had opportunities to discuss a wide range of ideas, issues and practices but were certainly not in a position to draw simple generalisations.

Key terms

The key terms we are using are contested and require some explanation of how, broadly, we characterized matters to help our developing understandings. In relation to ‘education’, we have proceeded inclusively and dynamically. We have explored the literatures of government policies and formal programmes, for and in, institutions where young people learn about, through and for engagement. We are also interested in informal education
involving ethos, the hidden curriculum and forms of learning that are not declared. And we are interested in non-formal education in which there is an acknowledgement of “the importance of education, learning and training which takes place outside recognized educational institutions” (Tight, 1996: 68).

Regarding the not uncontentious concept of youth, we, again broadly, employed the definition given by UNESCO (http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/youth-definition/):

“Youth” is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group.

In taking this as a working definition, we also recognised the need to be aware of other approaches to characterizing ‘youth’ including, for example, experiencing compulsory education and the period prior to getting a full time job. We are alert to regionally based definitions (e.g., the African Youth Charter uses 15-35 years; in some cultures the period before marriage may be seen as ‘youth’ or ‘wait time’).

Matters of young people being active were framed principally in relation to the public sphere. Without being content to see entirely discrete definitions of the public and private, we were interested in:
...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.

(Marquand, 2004: 27)

The above allowed us a measure of flexibility in which our discussions could take place. Broadly, we conceive youth activism as referring ‘to behaviour performed by adolescents and young adults with a political intent’ (Hart and Linkin Gullan (2010) p.67) thus making connections with issues of power and justice in many contexts. We recognize activism as being action on behalf of a cause, and action that goes beyond conventional politics or routines (Martin, 2007). It is commonly construed as challenging the status quo within a progressive framework, promoting equality and the rights of those with less power (Kiwan, 2018). That said, activism can just as well be used to attack the weak or take on more illiberal forms. Bray-Collin’s (2016) study of youth activism in Lebanon, for example, illustrated how activism contributed to the reproduction and renewal of sectarianism in politics. But typically, activists are seen as challengers to policies and practices, trying to achieve a social goal, and not to obtain power themselves. Horowitz (2017) defines activists as people who are involved with creating some kind of social, structural, or institutional change. In other words, an activist is not a person who provides “services” or “helps” the
needy but rather a person who attempts to change the underlying conditions that produce injustice or inequality.

Activism, Martin (2007) noted, is too nuanced to be classified simplistically into political left and right, the former known as progressive or radical, and the latter, conservative or reactionary. For example, activism against a waste dump or chemical factory can be interpreted as a conservative move because it seeks to maintain the status quo in the face of industries trying to change it. Similarly, environmentalists seeking to return a region to earlier vegetation patterns, on one hand, can be described as radicals because they are challenging the logic of industrial development; on the other hand, they can just as well be reactionaries as they hark back to an earlier time. Alternatively, Vromen (2003) suggested that participation need not be bifurcated into acts that are political or those that are not, those that conform either to traditional or radical paradigms. Instead, participation can be seen broadly as “acts that can occur, either individually or collectively, that are intrinsically concerned with shaping the society that we want to live in” (Vromen, 2003, pp. 82-83).

The contemporary context regarding activism and engagement

Civic engagement and political participation are necessary conditions for democracies to function effectively. This means that the participation of citizens is essential if pluralistic and inclusive societies are to be viable and sustainable (IDEA, 1999; Norris, 200; Harrop, 2001; Power Inquiry, 2006). Since the late twentieth century, interest in the condition of democracy has become of increasing concern to many governments, political scientists, international organizations, political commentators, and political parties (Print, Milner,
A general mistrust of democracy has been growing over the past decade. This is evidenced by a decline in public trust and voter engagement, and increasingly negative media representations of politicians and formal institutions, particularly in established, core democracies around the world (Ehsan, 2018; Fieldhouse, Tranmer & Russell, 2007; Stoker, 2006; Triffitt, 2018).

Levels of youth engagement, disengagement, and civic education

The existing literature is divided about the nature and level of young people’s civic engagement and political participation. On the one side of the international debates is a body of literature that rages about youth disengagement from civic and political life. The findings on this side of the research reiterate that young people are apathetic, disinterested in, and not very knowledgeable about formal political processes. Conventional measures, in particular, low voter turnout and reduced membership in associations have been used as key evidence (Dalton, 2013; Vromen, 1995). It appears that many young people are disengaging from democracy and political participation, and they have become particularly alienated from mainstream conventional politics (Norris, 2003). The issue of youth civic disengagement has caused a great deal of anxiety in government, academic and education policy circles of many democracies.

Research focused mainly on the phenomenon of youth engagement from electoral matters, emphasizing that participation through voting contributes to nourishing and perpetuating democracy. While healthy democracies may be characterized by the participation of their citizens, they also require the freedom of their press, the condition of their courts and legal processes, and the evidence of equity and so forth. Evidence suggests Hungarians’ intentions to demonstrate are amongst the lowest in Europe (Gáti 2010). According to Csizik
the majority of children learn within the family to distance themselves from politics. Young people believe that politicians are disinterested in the opinions of youth and that youth have no voice in the influence of country affairs (Szabó and Bauer 2009; Szabó 2013).

Nonetheless, Vromen (2003) argued that these sorts of findings lead to a view that young people lack the requisite knowledge about formal political processes, and they have not been successfully socialized into their respective political cultures, a problem described as ‘civic deficit’ (Australian Civic Expert Group, 1993). This way of conceptualizing young people political understanding and practice makes a particular assumption: that is, it is good for citizens to know more about the formal system of government and that this knowledge would probably be a counter to young citizens’ feelings of apathy, cynicism and so on. It imposes a prescribed, homogenous conception of what being civically engaged should look like for young people. Research has shown that the reality is that young people have a diversity of participatory experiences, including more inclusive everyday experiences (Gaiser, De Rijke, Spannring, 2010; Vromen, 2003, 2008; Vromen & Collin, 2010). In Australia for example, a resounding feature of the literature reporting on actual existing practices of youth activism and engagement was that, and contrary to the earlier reports cited in the introduction, young Australians are motivated to actively participate within their communities, both now and in the future (Black, 2010; Gidley, 2010). Even in Hungary where young people are in general apolitical and passive with many indicators of detachment and cynicism there are certain conditions when they become ‘rational rebels’ (Szabó & Oross, 2017), suddenly raising their voices. In Hungary, this happens almost exclusively in cases when politics, irrespective of its political or ideological content, intrudes directly and immediately in their everyday world. More broadly, there may be a range of
structural and logistical barriers that mean there is a significant mismatch between a desire to participate and the actual opportunity for young people to practice activism. Gidley (2010) presents research from 128 secondary students at three largest Steiner schools in Australia to show that respondents were positive about the need for activism, and their potential to act.

Civic and citizenship education in formal settings

The most prominent response to concerns about low levels of knowledge, understanding about and engagement in contemporary society has been proposals for the institutionalization of compulsory political, civic or citizenship education into the school curriculum (Civics Expert Group, 1993; Qualifications & Curriculum Authority, 1998). Schools have introduced programmes to ensure that students gain basic concepts of civic knowledge so that young people become more actively engaged in civic life.

Formal education has long been understood to play an important role in encouraging the active engagement in civic life (Dalton, 2006; IEA related, ICCS related cites?) Yet there is evidence that suggests that where levels of formal education have increased over time, civic knowledge has largely stalled (Galston, 2004; Hughes & Sears, 2006; O’Neill, 2009). There are a wide range of initiatives and trends from across our countries.

In Australia youth participation has been repeatedly and consistently viewed as a core goal for Australian education and youth services over the last ten years. In their National Strategy for Young Australians, for example, the Australian Government (2010) made clear that it ‘respects and understands the value and contributions young people offer as citizens of today,
not just the leaders of tomorrow’ (2010). The importance of young Australians’ active participation forms a key goal of Australian Schooling (MCEETYA, 2008). The current Australian Curriculum is predicated explicitly on helping ‘all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens’ (ACARA, 2018a; emphasis added; for more detailed analyses of action as part of the school curriculum in Australia see, for example, Peterson and Tudball, 2017; Peterson and Bentley, 2016; Reichert and Print, 2017; Reichert, 2016). In addition, the rationale for the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship makes reference to students exploring ways they ‘can actively shape their lives, value their belonging in a diverse and dynamic society, and positively contribute locally, nationally, regionally and globally. As reflective, active and informed decision-makers, students will be well placed to contribute to an evolving and healthy democracy that fosters the wellbeing of Australia as a democratic nation’ (ACARA, 2018a).

From the late 1990s onwards, different studies reported important shifts in how young people were engaging in civic matters in Canada, suggesting less engagement in formal politics (e.g., voting, party membership) and an increasing level of involvement in what may be referred to as informal or non-electoral political activities (e.g., community service, work with civil society organizations) in areas of personal interest and social justice (e.g., anti-racist initiatives, environment, Indigenous peoples’ concerns, LGBTQ rights) (Hughes & Sears, 2008; Llewellyn, Cook, and Molina, 2010; Ménard, 2010; Turcotte, 2015).

Attention to citizenship education and notions of civic engagement in schooling contexts during this time has become increasingly evident in spheres of Canadian educational
research, provincial and territorial curriculum policy reform, and pedagogical practice. Varying conceptions of citizenship education (Osborne, 2001; Sears, 1996; Shultz, 2007; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) have received increasing consideration, in relation to curriculum purposes and pedagogical practices. Different studies have noted the nuanced nature of youth civic engagement, highlighting interconnections with other distinctive dimensions of civic learning including social identity, indigeneity education, issues of social justice, students’ lived experiences and concerns, learning practices, and in some instances, transnational considerations (Bickmore, 2014; Broom, 2016; Ho, Clarke & Dougherty, 2015; Peck, Thompson, Chareka, Joshee & Sears, 2010).

Broadened notions of citizenship and civic learning have become more evident in provincial and territorial curriculum policy reforms (education is organized provincially rather than nationally in Canada). Active civic engagement, as a learning goal, has became more visible in the rhetoric of various subject areas, cross-curricular policy documents (related to such areas as character education, equity education, sustainability education), and day-to-day school-based governance, discipline, and community service guidelines. (Llewellyn, Cook, Westheimer, Giron & Suurtamm, 2007; Sears, 2004). In Ontario, for example, a Citizenship Education Framework was introduced in 2013 to provide general curriculum guidance (K-12) to “bring citizenship education to life, not only in Social Studies, History, and Geography, but in many other subjects as well” (The Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 10).

Classroom, schoolwide, community-based, and online learning ideas and resources have been developed to strengthen civic engagement learning experiences. Linked to these experiences has been an increasing attention to inquiry-oriented, interactive, inclusive teaching and learning strategies focusing on everyday civic issues and questions of social justice (Bickmore,
2014; Evans, 2008; Llewellyn, Cook, & Molina, 2010; Molina-Girón 2013; Sears 2004) to assist students to become better informed about current civic themes and issues and to build their capacities for inquiry and engagement. Moving towards these broadened characterizations of civic engagement through formal education have, however, proven to be complicated. Various research studies have identified a variety of challenges signalling uneven and fragmented access and learning experiences Evans, Evans, & Vemic, 2019).

In England the key initiative in the development of citizenship education in schools was the Crick Report (1998). This characterized citizenship as social and moral responsibility, political literacy and community involvement. The National Curriculum for citizenship went through a number of changes. The version of the National Curriculum for citizenship education that was in place until 2013 focused explicitly on 3 pairs of concepts: democracy and justice; identities and diversity and ‘rights and responsibilities’. Crucially, these were seen as substantive concepts. In other words, they signified (in ways that are close to understanding, fundamental principles, perspectives, context and content) what the subject of citizenship is all about. They were complemented by a further set of concepts that outlined the way in which citizenship should be studied and enacted. Critical thinking and enquiry; advocacy and representation and, informed and responsible action were highlighted.

The integration of these substantive and procedural concepts provided for an extremely valuable framework in which thinking, feeling and acting is given attention. In this way conceptual depth is dynamically achieved allowing for example proper reflective consideration of the interplay between emotion, cognition and action (Wood, Taylor, Atkins
& Johnston 2018). As well as being theoretically coherent it had the advantage of working in practice. Individual researchers (e.g., Whiteley, 2012), as well as research organisations (Kerr et al 2010) and the government inspection agency (Ofsted 2013), all – without ignoring continuing challenges - commended its success. Since 2014 the curriculum has bene changed to focus on civics (knowledge of political structures and legal systems), volunteering and personal money management.

In Hungary in the 21st century there have been a number of key policy initiatives. In 2003 the second National Core Curriculum (243/2003. (XII. 17.) Korm. rendelet a Nemzeti alaptanterv kiadásáról, bevezetéséről és alkalmazásáról) incorporates the education of social and civic competence as a competence including the critical analysis of political decision-making, participation in decision-making, primarily through participation in elections. The third National Core Curriculum (A Kormány 202/2007. (VII. 31.) rendelete a Nemzeti alaptanterv kiadásáról, bevezetéséről és alkalmazásáról szóló 243/2003. (XII. 17.) Korm. rendelet módosításáról) in 2007 was created by the ruling socialist government which incorporated the education of active citizenship (Ridley, Fülöp, 2014), and it emphasized the ‘formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities that help students become active citizens’. The National Youth Strategy (The National Youth Strategy 2009–2024) championed active citizenship as a key objective in enhancing the success of young people and their communities. The National Core Curriculum (110/2012. (VI. 4.) Korm. Rendelet a Nemzeti alaptanterv kiadásáról, bevezetéséről és alkalmazásáról) was introduced in 2012 and includes education for citizenship and democracy as one of the 12 main educational goals of the educational system and civic competence as one of the nine key
competencies that the schools should develop in students. Community Service for secondary school students is mandatory since 2012.

In Lebanon the situation regarding formal schooling is very challenging. Over two thirds of schools in Lebanon are private schools, with a wide range in quality. Government or state schools are typically of poor quality and lacking in resources. Palestinian children are typically educated by UNRWA through the Lebanese school curriculum, in a context where there is no route to legal citizenship, or expectation of achieving integration or equal rights.

In Singapore the introduction of National Education (NE) in 1997 signaled a structured and comprehensive approach to infuse both the school curriculum with appropriate citizenship attitudes, skills and values (Weninger & Koh, 2014). An aspect of NE is the Community Involvement Programme (CIP) where students volunteer, take on a community projects or service-learning. The government intends that through CIP, young people become “good citizens” - social activists who help improve the community through sanctioned and controlled ways, in apolitical manner. In many ways, these efforts have succeeded. These activities, “although not aimed at political change, nevertheless foster social capital, and cultivate civic identity among young people” (Zhang, 2013, p. 256). Thus, youth activism in Singapore has undergone much change in meaning and texture, from a strongly political and dynamic activism, to a more community-oriented activism focusing on social good.

It is important to go beyond describing the structure of these attempts in formal education settings to develop understanding and engagement. The process of learning is vital. According to Hughes and Sears, best practice in citizenship education must “engage
students in meaningful activities designed to help them make sense of, and develop competence with, civic ideas and practices” (2006, p. 7). Specifically, a classroom that fosters “a free, open and respectful exchange of ideas is positively related to young people’s level of knowledge about democratic processes.” (Campbell, 2008, p. 450). The literature frequently proposes classroom discussions and teaching controversial issues as an essential to develop democratic, critical citizens who actively and responsibly participate in society (e.g. Althof & Berkowitz 2006; Bartels, Onstenk, & Veugelers 2016; Haste 2004; Hess & Avery 2008; Hess & McAvoy, 2014; Knight Abowitz & Harnish 2006; Osler & Starkey 2006; Schuitema, Ten Dam, & Veugelers 2008).

Summarizing the developments and issues that have been raised about educating about and for engagement we recognize increasing attention to particular approaches.

- Real life and relevant political questions
- Varied ways of knowing and active involvement in the learning process
- Enquiry-based learning
- Decision-making, public issue investigation, ethical thinking, peace-building and conflict management
- Collaboration and deliberative discussion
- Varied learning approaches and practices that are equitable and responsive to learner diversity
- Safety and well-being, and self-reflection
Of course, we are not suggesting that all the above are actually implemented in schools. Questions remain about the extent to which transmission (rather than transformative work) is prevalent and whether there are limits to critique in contexts in which there is a significant lack of attention to professional development.

Civic spaces relevant to education beyond formal schooling

There is, of course, a good deal of learning that is accidental, unplanned and - at times - probably unhelpful in difficult circumstances. It has been estimated that at least 300,000 Syrian children in Lebanon are out of school (Watkins 2013). Referred to as a lost generation, there are serious long-term consequences with many children working on the streets and even those fortunate to enroll in schools, often attend state schools in shifts, in a system struggling to cope, and where they are often subject to discrimination and racism. They face psychological difficulties as well as practical difficulties such as differences in language, certification and expenses.

There are, however, positive initiatives taking place beyond schools. Examples of recent citizenship education initiatives in Lebanon include Basma wa Zeitouneh in Sabra and Shatila camp, an NGO which set up a school for 6-14 year olds, a United Youth Lebanon Project working with disadvantaged Lebanese youth and Palestinian refugees through education, and the NGO, Adyan, which has developed a citizenship curriculum with an emphasis on integrating religious diversity (Kiwan et al., 2016).
There are new modes of participation exemplified by the anticorporate globalization movement (Milzen, 2015), the growth of virtual communities (David, 2013; Zhang, 2013), and the use of social media in mobilizing youth activism and protests such as in the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong (Chu, 2018), the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan (Tsatsou, 2018). The role of social media in mobilizing youth activism such as protest movements is an emerging area of research and was noteworthy in all our countries. There are mixed findings from research related to social media, engagement and education. In contrast to the rather low levels of engagement described above regarding Hungary, there is discussion of more active engagement in the context of virtual citizenship (e.g., Glózer, 2013). In east Asia, findings, for example, by Chu (2018) and Tsatsou (2018) with regards to the Umbrella and Sunflower Movements are limited and tentative. Contrary to popular belief, Chu found that social media played limited role in mobilizing young people in the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement. In fact, traditional forms of communication such as face-to-face discussion and negotiation were far more instrumental. Similarly, findings from Tsatuo’s (2018) study of the role of Facebook in the informal organization of the Sunflower Movement in Taiwan challenged Bennett and Segerberg’s (2012) idea that, in digitally mediated activism, connective action networks self-organize without central or ‘lead’ organizational actors. Leadership structure still exist in technologically mediated citizen activism, albeit a relatively non-hierarchical leadership, in which decision-making is more fluid, complex and multilayered. To what extent this resonates among youth across other protest movements needs further comparative research.

**Shifting politics and re-framing young people**
Across our countries there are indications of a broad range of characterizations of young people. The instrumental characterization sees youth as the ‘future’ and has principally an economic and, developmental perspective. Some emphasize vulnerability seeing youth as (necessarily or otherwise) excluded and in need of protection. There is a significant amount of attention principally in the media but also in some academic bases (especially those associated with character education) as youth as morally deficient with the consequent need for risky and dangerous behaviour to be controlled. Finally some see young people as apathetic and apolitical focusing not on public issues but only on individual consumerism.

A related body of research typically compares the differences between young people and the older generation. Quintelier (2007), for example, identified three reasons for these characterizations of youth and the perceived political participation gap between younger and older people. Firstly, due to life cycle and generational effects; secondly, the attractiveness of new forms of participation has caused younger people to divert from traditional forms of political participation as practiced by older generations (such as voting); and thirdly, that there is a difference in the way young people embrace politically related conceptions compared to older people. The second and third reasons are the more relevant to the context of our project.

We do not find that young people are politically disinterested and apathetic. Perhaps, ongoing processes of social change have produced shifting conditions and paradigms of citizenship that are distinctively meaningful to different age groups (Bennett, Wells, Rank, 2008). Beck (1999, 2000), Bennet (1998, 2007, 2008), and Inglehart (1997) outlined how globalization has led to the restructuring of economies and production among post-industrial democracies that entail broad structural dislocations, leaving individuals with
increased personal responsibility and risk. In these conditions, how social identity is formed, Giddens (1991) argued, has similarly changed toward increased individual responsibility for managing personal identity as individuals become detached from modern organizations and institutions that provided commonly shared status, social memberships and related identity ascription. Unsurprisingly, shifting politics has affected young people, they now are less inclined to feel a sense of duty to participate politically in conventional ways, such as voting or following issues in the news. They are coming of age in post-material conditions, with fewer organizational memberships and more horizontal personal networks. It should not be surprising they are experiencing many of the core party, election and government elements of politics as distant, inauthentic, and often unresponsive to their lived political experiences (Coleman 2008, Coleman & Blumler 2009). Instead young people tend to favour more personally expressive or self-actualizing politics and affiliations, and these can be fluid and changing. They display greater inclination to embrace issues that connect to lifestyle values, ranging from moral concerns to environmental quality. Rather than framing young people as apathetic, it can me reframed as increasing numbers of young citizens are creating their own sense of political engagement and identity in unstructured and postmodern conditions. The question for education is how to understand how civic learning in various environments can address the changing civic orientations and lived experiences of younger people.

**Overarching perspectives on activism, engagement and education**

How can we make sense of this complex picture? There are several typologies that frame the nature of engagement and what it means educationally. We will mention here only 4 of those typologies. Firstly, McLaughlin (1992) categorises citizenship on a minimal-maximal
continuum. The location of differing conceptions of citizenship within the continuum are based on the nature of its appeal to the values of identity, virtues, political involvement and social prerequisites. Secondly, Andreotti (2006) explores ‘soft’ and ‘critical’ approaches which are particularly relevant to postcolonial, global and cosmopolitan perspectives on the choice between charitable, individually framed conservative approaches and the collective and structurally positioned inclusive and democratic stances. Thirdly, Kahne and Westheimer (2004) have identified the personally responsible; participatory; and, justice-oriented citizen. Finally, Oxley and Morris (2013): cosmopolitan based (political, moral, economic and cultural) and advocacy based (social, critical, environmental and spiritual).

We feel that all the above typologies have merit. In our work however we found that our readings of literature and our discussions with colleagues around the world was helping us to develop a slightly different framework. We emphasize the interdependence of social context and relationality, two key characteristics in our proposed framework of relational capacities. We recognize that capacities across the six countries, and when applied elsewhere, would have to be understood as mutually constructing, complex and contextual (Hopkins, 2017).

Broadly, we argue for 2 types of relational capacities. The first is societal in that it involves capacities which are about how youth understand and relate to their communities. This is largely a vertical relationship highlighting citizen to state, and involving an understanding of context and making meaning of citizenship. The second set of capacities is the interpersonal, which are about how youth understand and relate to other people. In this largely horizontal
relationship of citizen to citizen there is working with others and reflexivity. These are more fully developed in the paper by Peterson et al (2019).

For these relational capacities to be developed we need (building on our arguments above about the centrality of process) to develop a clear framework regarding pedagogy. A review of studies explicitly associated with ‘educating for civic engagement’ throughout the 20th and into the 21st centuries reveals deepening and shifting understandings and intentions of pedagogical approaches and practices (in theory and practice)
Across our sample of 6 countries and as a result of our literature reviews and discussions with colleagues in many parts of the world, we wish to highlight a number of overarching points.

There is rhetorically strong commitment to educating about and for engagement. Policy makers assert a strong link between education (in schools and otherwise) and engagement. Beyond that general point, there is much debate and uncertainty. We believe that, although there are exceptions and contextual considerations, there is a strong desire on the part of young people for engagement. Further, if we are to adopt a wide angled characterization of what engagement means, then we believe there are in practice high levels of actual engagement. There are, however, clear indications of certain groups of people being less able to participate than others. Levels of social capital and efficacy as well as practical resource support are key ways to explain levels of engagement.

There are 3 fundamental challenge when exploring the relationship between education and engagement. Broadly, we can think about these challenges in relation to questions about the characterization of engagement; who has the power to determine that characterization; and how that characterization may be developed for educational purposes.

Firstly, regarding the meaning of engagement there are difficulties associated with the limited ways in which engagement is often discussed means. We may at times under-estimate what is happening. It is hard to know when a person would not be engaged in society. We do not wish to suggest that traditional and limited ways of identifying
engagement in public life (e.g., voter turnout) are unimportant. But we do wish to recognize young people’s changing approaches to participation and argue for educators in a variety of contexts to take that seriously. There are new diversified approaches to engagement (e.g., through technology) and these bring challenges. There is uncertainty on the part of policy makers to know what to do about these less formal instances of engagement. If it is not easy to identify the numbers involved and evaluate the impact that is occurring, then it is difficult for those initiatives to be shaped and there is uncertainty. Policy makers, for various reasons, are used to being able to identify through concrete data who is doing what. And although there are very many benefits to be achieved in educational contexts from the professionalization of learning, less formal approaches may also be seen as challenging. A teacher’s role tends to be distinct from a community or youth worker and it is structurally and individually difficult to bring these people together.

Additionally, the power to develop and implementing a particular characterization is controversial. Debates are fiercely conducted about, for example, schools being places where there are opportunities for exploring moral issues or learning good moral behaviour. Who has the right to determine what is an acceptable form of education about and for engagement?

Finally, if we have determined what engagement means and who has the power to determine that meaning, we need to be clearer about how to develop things in practice. We have raised many issues in this and other papers about the need for careful attention to pedagogy. In practice formal civic and citizenship education is low status and lacking structural support. This may clearly be seen in the absence of high status examinations,
professional development for teachers and clear routes through to respected (and well rewarded) careers.

In short, we recommend 3 things. We should:

- Clarify the characterization of education about, through and for civic and citizenship engagement. This is a call for a form of knowledge that is robust and dynamic.
- Enhance the status of the area (e.g., research-based, professional associations etc.)
- Ensure an appropriate pedagogical strategy that is capable of crossing boundaries (e.g., school-community) and making connections (e.g., teaching and assessing).

List of references


