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Creating citizenship communities

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Abstract

This article is presented by the partnership team of the Department of Education, University of York, UK and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), UK. We discuss the early stages of work on a project funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation on learning through and for community and citizenship by discussing current thinking and practice in schools; exploring young people's perceptions and practice; and, through the development of a focussed impact strategy encouraging partnerships to be established between professionals and others.

Key words: citizenship; community; education.

The political context for community and citizenship

Community and citizenship have been key factors in political debate for many years. Significant political and social change leads many to argue that citizenship and community are not only the ways in which change can be understood but also a means by which equality and diversity are achieved whilst avoiding uniformity and fragmentation. Since 2002 citizenship education has been a part of the National Curriculum in England. As well as being a curriculum issue there have been wider expectations placed on schools. Alan Johnson (Secretary of State for Education and Skills) explained that:

> By community cohesion, we mean working towards a society in which there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities; a society in which the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued; a society in which similar life opportunities are available to all; and a society in which strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community.

The current coalition government's ambitions include the 'big society'. David Cameron (current UK Prime Minister) explained in a speech made in Liverpool in July 2010 that:

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

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(http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2010/07/big-society-speech-53572, accessed 4 April 2011).

Cameron has had to fight accusations that the 'big society' will struggle in the face of expenditure cuts, or more fundamentally, that the initiative is actually an example of a neo-liberal cost cutting measure.

Some of the principal ways in which community and citizenship are characterised

In the academic literature there are several ways in which citizenship and community are discussed. The most fundamental of these may be seen in relation to liberal and/or civic republican emphases. From a liberal perspective, private citizens have their rights and expect that government will, in many ways, leave them alone. The civic republican perspective, on the other hand, emphasizes the duties or responsibilities of citizens to those in the community.
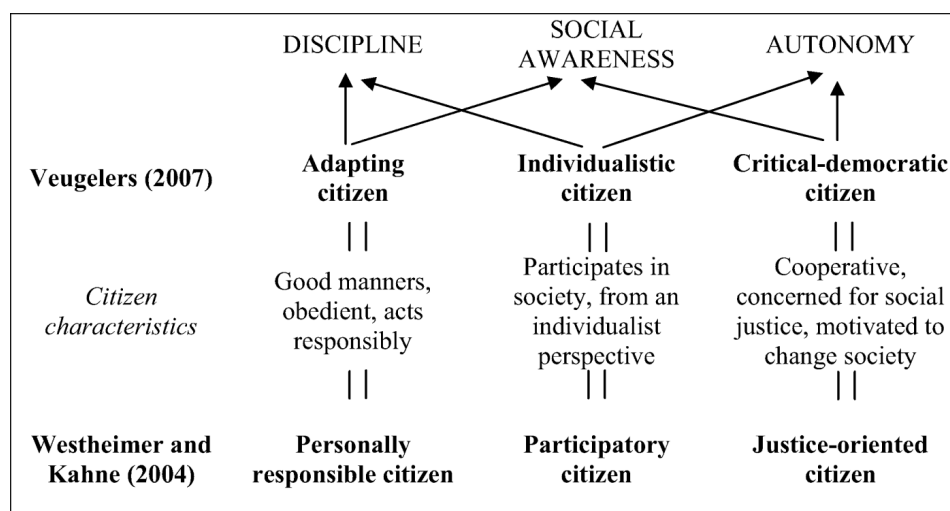
Legal and political status affects the characterisation of citizenship and community. Emphasising formal political and legal status may not always be seen as entirely congruent with place-based characterisations of citizenship. Whereas legal frameworks will tend to be associated with nation states and constitutional politics, there may be a different (perhaps more affective and identity based) sense of community and citizenship associated with other communities including the local or global community where particular interest, norm related or friendship groups may exist.

These philosophical, political and geographically framed debates relate essentially to identity and this is connected to recognition of the existence of a diverse society. Whilst it is possible to identify simultaneously with various communities Crick was seen to come late to a particular focus on a diverse multicultural society. Osler (2003) went so far as to claim that the Crick report 'contains albeit unwittingly an example of institutionalized racism in its characterization of minorities' (p.49). The Ajegbo Report (2007) provided a higher profile for citizenship and diversity and other related developments perhaps led to the incorporation of a wider characterisation of the distinctions between private and public (Kiwan 2008). There is certainly a need to continue the work of Arnot (2009) in emphasising the role of gender in considerations of citizenship and communities. There is a need to explore not only where the community is, nor how it is framed in terms of formal status but also to consider what psychological, cultural, social and other ties are perceived to exist between members.

Identity is connected to debates about the relative emphasis that would be placed on morality generally and, more particularly, religion. Some have suggested that religion is a positive force for community and citizenship (e.g. Arthur, Gearon and Sears 2010) while others (e.g. Heater 1999) have largely chosen not to discuss it or (e.g. Crick quoted in Arthur, Gearon and Sears, p. 2) argued explicitly that citizenship is secular. Many examples exist of religion as a barrier as well as a spur to integration. The nature of morality more generally and its specific connection with citizenship has been explored with arguments made for schools not to focus on enterprise culture (e.g. Beck 1998).

Citizens are often exhorted to do something. Crick (2000) argued that: "Political activity by citizens is the very essence of a free society" (p. 130). And yet, we need to be cautious about what is meant by that engagement. It would not be helpful to propose that rights are only available when responsibilities are enacted. The seemingly obvious positions about justice in a democracy break down very readily if this sort of exchange is accepted too easily. There needs to be a clearer consideration of the nature of what has been described as micro and macro participation (Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley 2004). The former focuses on the relationship between citizens and agents of the state (health, education, local planning decisions etc); the latter is concerned with activities that can directly influence the state at the national level (e.g. voting by an individual; collective action by pressure groups). It is possible that macro participation is decreasing while the micro in a less deferential society is increasing. The latter may signal greater individual expression but also be may be self regarding, inconsistent and involve a reluctance to accept costs.

There have been many reviews of literature and attempts to capture an overarching sense of the purpose and nature of community and citizenship. For example, McLaughlin's (1992) philosophical exploration of maximal and minimal conceptions of citizenship cuts across all the themes that have been discussed above. Annette (2003) has suggested that community as a whole may be characterised in several distinct ways: as a place or neighbourhood; as a normative ideal linked to respect, inclusion and solidarity; as something based on a politics of identity and recognition of difference; and, as a political ideal linked to participation, involvement and citizenship. Johnson and Morris (2010) divide citizens into three types which have obviously relevance for how one might perceive and act in relation to community.

	DISCIPLINE	SOCIAL AWARENESS	AUTONOMY
Veugelers (2007)	**Adapting citizen**	**Individualistic citizen**	**Critical-democratic citizen**
Citizen characteristics	Good manners, obedient, acts responsibly	Participates in society, from an individualist perspective	Cooperative, concerned for social justice, motivated to change society
Westheimer and Kahne (2004)	**Personally responsible citizen**	**Participatory citizen**	**Justice-oriented citizen**

In short it is insufficient to see community as a panacea for many of the challenges that face society. It is possible that there is an implied rejection of the 'strangers' who are not members of the community that has been identified; a possible assumption or implication that all who are members have the same interests; that there might be an authoritarian firming up of the status quo (or desire to reinvent a mythical 'golden' age). The nature of community and citizenship is not in themselves simply a 'good' thing.

Empirical data relating to community and citizenship

What Sorts of Engagement are Occurring?

We know that young people are positive about engagement (e.g. Haste, 2005) and act as volunteers (Pye et al., 2009). Davies, L. et al., 2006) suggest participation levels are already high and can be improved upon still further. There seems to be fairly widespread volunteering:

> Surveys show that close to one half of young people have experience of volunteering with the most common area being sports and exercise, followed by hobbies and recreation, youth and children's services, and health and social welfare. ….. many young people of all types and backgrounds are involved in informal voluntary and community action. Studies show around three quarters of young people have been involved in 'constructive social participation' through community networks, neighbourliness, campaigning or informal political action (Gaskin, 2004, p. iv).

Morrow (1994) found that 40% of 11-16 year olds in his sample of English young people had regular home responsibilities (minding siblings, cleaning, laundry etc) and almost as many helped in a family business or earned money outside the home. Becker, Dearden and Aldridge (2001) and Orellana, Dorner and Pulido (2003) make similar points about the vital role of young people in local and family settings, especially in relation to language in immigrant families. These valuable contributions to family and community life must not be overlooked in attempts to formalise young people's volunteering and civic engagement.

Bennett (2008) has discussed the ways in which different forms of citizenship can and perhaps should develop which challenge our traditional notions of linear, formal, physical engagement in favour of virtual involvement.

Who is taking part?

There is some evidence that urban youth from deprived neighbourhoods already make contributions to - and have a detailed and highly specialized knowledge of - their local communities (Alexander, 2008). But some research has suggested that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, in particular, may be less likely to engage in civic action. Darton et al (2003, p. 9) have suggested that: 'Poverty in Britain is inextricably

intertwined with disadvantages in health, housing, education and other aspects of life. It is hard for people who lack resources to take advantage of the opportunities available to the rest of society'.

Why do people engage?

The question of why people engage may be considered in relation to a wide variety of factors including individually framed social and altruistic tendencies, preferences for civic action in which issues are identified and acted upon and more entrepreneurial approaches in which one is attempting to develop particular skill sets and generate advantage in relation to potential future opportunities in education and employment. This relates to questions of whether resources are available to the young person: 'whether or not the young person has the knowledge, networks, and skills to be able to act upon a civic issue of concern' (Cremin et al 2009).

Wider societal factors are important. Letki (2008) argues that social deprivation is the key explanatory variable concerning engagement rather than diversity. Cremin et al (2009) suggest that engagement occurs in part through "motivation through membership attachment - the more a young person feels attached to a particular community or group, the more motivated out of a sense of connection and duty they are to engage civically on its behalf".

Barriers and facilitation

Those lacking civic capital including low sense of efficacy and living in fragmented and disadvantaged communities will not always take part in formally recognized ways as others. Those barriers are significant encompassing individual, organisational and structural matters. The V (2007) study found that 90% of young people surveyed felt that there were barriers stopping them from getting involved in community action. We know that when young people perceive a significant disjunction between their own and legitimated characterizations that there is likely to be deliberate disengagement (see National Audit Office, 2005).

Whiteley (2004) suggests that "participation responds both to incentives and to the mobilizing activities of other people. It is possible to change rates of participation and to do so in a relatively short space of time in a way that can boost civil society". There are many strategies that have been suggested to achieve this goal. Families and social networks may be important:

> Most young people get into volunteering through word of mouth and being told about it or asked by someone already involved. Friends are particularly important and peer advocacy is seen as the key mechanism to stimulate volunteering (Institute for Volunteering Research 2004)

There may also be particular conditions which can be generated by those who work with young people. Keating et al 2009 argue for an inclusive ethos, welcoming physical environment and a willingness to deal realistically and honestly with issues that affect individuals and communities in contemporary society. Davies et al (2009) draw attention to 5 strategies for youth workers and teachers: using high level interpersonal skills to create a positive process of participation; targeting key decision makers in order to gather support; acting very carefully in relation to controversial issues; maintaining realistic commitments; and focusing on catalysts for change. There is uncertainty about a range of issues that may be considered as a way of promoting engagement. For example:

> There is no clear consensus among young people on incentives and rewards for volunteering, although most agree that getting training, awards and certificates, and working with friends would encourage more volunteering. (Institute for Volunteering Research 2004).

Does citizenship education support community engagement?

Of course, there are significant barriers to the development of citizenship education. But generally the situation is developing very positively. The NFER (Keating et al 2009) has identified school approaches to citizenship education as involving 'progressing schools' where citizenship education is developed in the curriculum, the school and wider community; 'implicit schools' which are not yet focusing on citizenship in the curriculum but where there is a range of opportunities; 'focused schools' which concentrate on the curriculum; and 'minimalist schools' which are at an early stage of development. The NFER has also identified types of school which are 'curriculum driven', 'efficacy driven', 'participation driven' and where there are 'multiple drivers' across curriculum and other matters.

There are now more discrete slots for citizenship in school timetables. Although there is still evidence of traditional didactic teaching methods being used there is now an increased acceptance of the need for open discussion involving student voice and a greater confidence by students and teachers about their capacity to teach and learn in classrooms in which there is an atmosphere, or climate, appropriate for citizenship education. There is more specialist staffing and the coverage of the National Curriculum has improved although there is some way to go in ensuring good links between schools and communities.

> Most of the schools visited gave opportunities for some students to excel in active citizenship, such as assuming leadership roles, volunteering to support the work of others or influencing change within the school or beyond. However, few schools monitored these opportunities to ensure that all students were involved or used the information to encourage others to participate. In some schools, participation was limited to particular groups, often of more able pupils (Ofsted 2010).

It is in light of this generally positive evidence that the present government has indicated that it is uncomfortable with what it sees as too much bureaucracy and an approach to education that is too ideological. In this context, comments have been made by the current Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, about the need to strengthen subjects such as History and Geography and to avoid what he refers to as "pseudo-subjects".

Methodology

There are three stages to our project 'creating citizenship communities'.

Firstly, we will identify the nature and levels of young people's engagement in school and other communities through a literature review and secondary data analysis. The literature review will focus on citizenship, community cohesion, and perceived inclusion among young people of secondary school age (11-18) on the basis of work published since approximately 2000. The literature will be drawn from policy, academic and professional sources and focus principally on England. We will search a number of databases using key words and develop a record of our work which includes an indication of the weight that we have placed on each source and key issues that need to be considered when developing our research instruments. The secondary data analysis will utilise the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) dataset. LSYPE is a large-scale longitudinal study of young people in England with the first wave collected in 2004. Data is collected from the same cohort of young people on an annual basis and includes information on various aspects of young people's lives. In 2008, a series of questions related to community cohesion where included in the face-to-face interviews with the 16,000 young people participating in the study. The analysis of the LSYPE data will focus on school factors in order to examine if citizenship, community cohesion, and perceived inclusion of young people varies by factors such as school deprivation, ethnic composition of the school, school type (i.e., community, foundation, voluntary aided, independent, academy), and overall school achievement (GCSEs A-C).

Secondly, we will conduct an on line survey of a representative sample schools within England to record what school-based staff understand and do in relation to community cohesiveness. School staff from 800 schools will be asked to complete an on-line questionnaire that will typically take 15 minutes to complete. The questions will seek to find out what school based staff understand and do in relation to community cohesiveness. The analysis of data will include: frequency of different responses to individual questions; assessment of representativeness of the achieved sample and development of weighting strategy if required to provide a national picture; analysis by type of school and school catchment area to assess whether there are any patterns in understanding and interpretation of, and approaches to developing citizenship communities; identification of case study schools; multivariate modelling, where appropriate to understand factors that determine the adoption of different approaches and their perceived effectiveness.

Thirdly, we will undertake in-depth case study work in 8 sites that explores and illuminates types of learning in relation to community cohesiveness. This learning will allow for reflection on a wide range of understandings and actions including curricular initiatives (e.g. the recently introduced requirement for enterprise in schools as well as citizenship education), whole school connections (e.g. with voluntary and other bodies) and young people's establishment of friendship, activist, consumer and other groups (e.g. through participation in actual and virtual communities).

Our study will have an analytical framework that will allow us to effectively synthesize the different elements of this study. Whilst we will report on the different stages of the study as findings emerge, we will triangulate evidence from all stages and research methods and clearly set out findings and conclusions against the study's objectives in the final report. Collaborative team analysis and writing will increase the validity and reliability of our study.

We hypothesize that a young person's sense of community cohesion does vary by school context. Specifically, it is hypothesized that lower levels of community cohesion will be found among young people who attend or have attended deprived schools or schools in deprived areas and who report low levels of a sense of belonging to their school. Young people who attend or have attended ethnically diverse schools will report a greater sense of perceived inclusion.

Outputs

We will produce several academic papers during the course of the project as well as organising a conference. Throughout we will be concerned to ensure that we are building bridges between academic and professional communities and adults and young people. As such we will produce a booklet for young people and a handbook of learning resources. We will ensure sustainability through our work with our high profile advisory group that includes people of different ages and with different expertise (charities, think tanks, and policy – the group includes a former Secretary of State for Education). We also intend to establish a Special Interest Group focusing on community at an international conference.

Conclusions

We know that adults have a general sense that community cohesion is a good thing, that young people hold varying views about the nature of community and that certain situations may discourage engagement. We know that success can be achieved in formal educational settings to promote citizenship and for community. However, we do not have a clear and detailed sense of the characterizations and perceptions of community held by young people and we do not have well established practices that would allow for enhanced participation. We argue that we need to establish more finely grained insights into young people's ideas and practices so that collaboratively based community cohesion strategies could be developed.

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