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The Complex Ecology of Young People's Community Engagement and the Call for Civic Pedagogues

This paper focuses upon the community engagement of young people growing up in socio-economically disadvantaged areas and the creation of apt civic learning spaces. It is in direct response to public policy within the UK, as in many other democratic countries, giving continued attention to how young people's active citizenship can be best supported. As a consequence of processes of globalisation, social change and technological advancement it is being increasingly recognised that young citizens face unprecedented challenges in the 21st century. At the same time young people growing up within areas of socio-economic disadvantage are commonly identified as being most at risk of social exclusion and discouragement with regard to their civic participation.

This paper draws from the *EngagED* project, a two-year study based in England that used a mixed methods research approach to explore the civic action and learning of young people living in both inner city and rural areas of socio-economic disadvantage. It presents an eco-systemic model of the host of factors and agencies that influence young people's civic identity and patterns of community engagement. It outlines two new civic learning spaces that were created in response to these complex ecologies and from these experiments in 'pre-figurative practice' proposes a set of key principles for the effective civic pedagogue. This radical notion of the civic educator moves away from educational strategies that seek to 'transform' young people into good future citizens, towards finding personalised ways of supporting young people 'as' citizens.

1 Introduction

In the face of unprecedented change through processes of globalisation, social transformation and technological advancement, increasing attention is being given within public policy worldwide to notions of citizenry and civic engagement. Global concern over modern day lifestyles failing to live within environmental limits; continued issues of inequitable distribution of wealth and power across and within nation states; and questions over the effective advancement of democratic forms of governance, are all contributing to a growing sense of 'citizenship challenge' in the 21st century.

In many European countries this civic concern is being compounded by

fears over young people's patterns of community engagement (Kerr 2002). Within the UK, notions of a 'democratic deficit' linked to the civic disengagement of young people have become prominent within research, media and policy-making arenas. This has led to a range of recent policies concerned with securing civic renewal or new forms of civic engagement that give emphasis to local governance (Annette 2010). Most recently the British Government has introduced the Big Society agenda promoting notions of localism and under its auspices launched a National Citizen Service pilot at a post 16 level (Cameron 2010). This follows on from formal educational policy within England that has given increasing attention to how young people's civic engagement can be remedied and the political culture of this country transformed. Citizenship education (CE) has been a statutory requirement within the English secondary school national curriculum since 2002, although the current government is significantly reducing its support for this remaining the case. Research has indicated that the standards of CE implementation over the last ten years, particularly with regard to active citizenship and political literacy elements, whilst improving over time have been mixed particularly in schools with no specialist trained citizenship teachers (Keating et al. 2010; Ofsted 2010).

Framed within this notion of a democratic deficit, young people growing up in socio-economically disadvantaged areas are commonly held to be the least civically engaged and the most at risk of social exclusion (Pye et al. 2009; Morrow 2002; Institute for Volunteering Research 2002; Roker et al. 1999).

The number of young people living in poverty in Britain continues to be a significant problem, with government statistics revealing that 3.8 million children were living in relative poverty, after housing costs, in 2009/10 (Department for Work and Pensions 2011). But the term socio-economic disadvantage is much broader than the poverty of fiscal inequalities. It recognises the inter-linking of issues that are mutually reinforcing, such as barriers with regard to education, employment, housing, health, and neighbourhood crime (Darton et al. 2003; Social Exclusion Unit 2004). Young people living in communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage therefore run the risk of facing greater contextual challenge in their civic lives than peers living in more affluent areas. This raises important areas of concern and debate for educational policy such as; how are young people growing up in socio-economically disadvantaged areas civically engaged in their communities, what are the opportunities and barriers that they face and how might civic educators aptly respond?

1.1 The *EngagED* Study

This paper reports on work conducted as part of the '*EngagED* – building voice, civic action and learning' research project. This two year qualitative study (2009-2011) was based in England and specifically focused on exploring the environmental factors that influence the civic identities and engagement patterns of young people growing up in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Funded by the Society for Educational Studies (SES) the

study involved collaboration between the Universities of Cambridge and Leicester and the national charity 'Community Service Volunteers.'

The *EngagED* project employed a mixed methods research approach and was developed through three interconnected stages. Stage One involved a systematic literature review that explored the existing knowledge base pertaining to young people's civic engagement. Stage Two built on this review and involved using surveys and focus groups to listen to the perspectives of young people growing up in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, and of organisations supporting their civic engagement. Stage Three involved practically responding to these findings by working in partnership with two secondary schools and in two community settings to create new civic learning spaces for young people. Resonating with the innovation in education approach of Fielding and Moss (2011) this development of 'pre-figurative practice,' where viable and apt alternatives are envisaged, served to fulfil a key impact objective for the *EngagED* project.

This paper begins by drawing from the young people's focus group findings. The specific aims of the focus groups were to:

- Explore young people's experiences of civic participation and volunteering;
- Examine young people's perspectives on their motivations for civic engagement;
- Identify the challenges they faced in their lives that may prevent or inhibit civic action.

In total the *EngagED* project conducted twenty-four focus groups with 163 participants. Of these 105 were female and 58 male. The youngest participant was 11 and the oldest 21 with the average age being 15 years old. The focus groups followed a rigorous ethical approval process and were located in a mix of inner city and rural areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Settings included: two secondary schools and an inner city Further Education (FE) College, an out of school service for young offenders, a facility for young people living in social service care and two youth volunteering organisations. For the purposes of this paper specific attention will be given to the voices of young people taken from the inner city FE College and secondary school settings.

This paper uses the focus group findings to present a view of young people growing up within a manifold context of interconnected agencies and institutions. It will be argued that the interplay of these agencies significantly impacts upon an individual's sense of civic identity and pattern of community engagement. In recognition of the complex ecologies of young citizen's lives today this paper moves on to consider the lessons learnt from conducting a number of civic action and learning innovations within both formal and informal educational settings. This work involved over 80 young people aged between 14 and 20 years old living in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, including inner city and rural settings. From these experiences five key principles are put forward for debate when envisioning the practice of the 'civic pedagogue.'

2 The Complex Ecologies of Young People's Civic Engagement

The *EngagED* project sought to access the voices of those most at risk of being excluded from the public policy arena. Globally this move to prioritise the voices of young people is endorsed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 12 which states "All people under 18 have the right to say what they think and be listened to by adults when adults make decisions that affect them" (UNICEF 1989). Increasingly within the UK it is being argued that young people's voice should be heard more strongly in the process of policy formation at all levels in order to create provision that is appropriately responsive and flexible (Hallet, Prout 2003). Similarly Rudduck and Flutter (2000) argue for a greater representation of young people within the decision-making processes of their own education.

Analysis of the *EngagED* focus groups primarily reveals the personalised nature of young people's civic action and learning. The diverse range of participants' individual experiences, perspectives and sense of identity is vital to acknowledge. However it has also been possible to recognise commonalities in terms of the key agencies and factors influencing participants' civic engagement. This synthesis has led to the following theoretical model (see Figure 1) with regard to the complex ecology of contextual factors contributing to young people's civic action and learning.

This model resonates with the approach of other studies in this area, particularly the theoretical framework derived by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement Study of Civic Knowledge and Engagement, which surveyed 140,000 secondary students in sixteen countries (Amadeo et al. 2002).
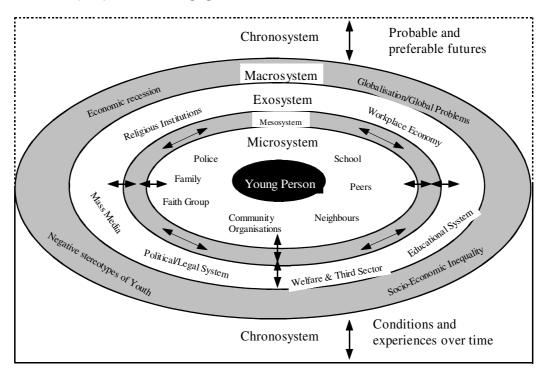
Figure 1. The complex ecology of contextual factors influencing young people's civic engagement

The analytical approach represented in Figure 1 draws generally from systems thinking and complexity theory (Morris, Martin 2009) and is based in particular upon the eco-systemic theory of human development by Urie Bronfenbrenner.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that a person's development is influenced by the layers of relationship with the people and agencies that surround them. At the closest level to the individual is the *microsystem* where a young person is impacted upon by direct contact with a variety of face-to-face relationships. Beyond this direct influence is an outer circle of people and agencies. This *exosystem* has an indirect impact on the young person through political, economic, community, educational and religious institutions and the mass media. Bronfenbrenner's theory also identifies an outer layer of a *macrosystem* where society has an influence upon a person's development through the prevailing attitudes, ideologies, narratives and discourses as well as economic conditions. In more recent eco-systemic conceptual models Bronfenbrenner (2004) identifies the temporal dimension of the *chronosystem*. This acknowledges that it is not only the present context that influences a young person's development but also the collective build up and changing nature of experiences over time. Finally, the eco-systemic model gives recognition to the intersectional nature of these different agencies of influence. This *mesosystem* highlights the interconnections and relations both within and across the different layers of contextual influence.

2.1 Young Citizens and the Microsystem Level

Participants within the *EngagED* focus groups identified a broad range of direct contacts that were influencing their civic engagement. These typically included family (parents, siblings, extended family), peers, school (teachers, implemented curriculum, and participation opportunities such as school councils), neighbours and religious/community groups.

Family

Young people commonly identified their family as being a key influence upon civic engagement. For some the family was a significant source of support and encouragement. For example a 15 year old male participant within an inner city setting spoke of parental encouragement to engage with community service opportunities now in order to help him fulfil his vocational aim to join the police force. But more commonly young people identified family, and the commitments this entailed, as being a pressure that squeezed their capacity for civic engagement outside of the boundaries of their extended families. These responsibilities included working in family businesses such as retail outlets, or helping to meet the needs of specific relatives:

> "As in like if my nan wants to go out to the GP or something like that. It's hard for her to speak in English…. So I have to be there for her." (Female Inner City FE College Setting).

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Older participants commonly presented as holding primary care responsibilities for siblings over extended periods, such as this young person who explained that due to her mother working:

> "I have got two younger siblings so... my younger sister I have to pick her up after school and make sure she is doing alright and everything so I have got to make sure that the house is in order." (Female Inner City FE College Setting).

This care role within the family was found to not solely fall on female participants, as this account by a male young person illustrates:

> "Yes because I am the oldest in my family and I have a five year old brother and I have to help my mum because she is single so I keep hold of the house basically with my brother who is 17." (Male Inner City FE College Setting).

Another participant spoke of having extended family living in Somalia, including his father, and he saw a limitation on his ability to access more formally organised volunteering activities to be his present and future role as key financial provider to his family.

So for a considerable number of young participants an overriding impression was that civic engagement, particularly in the sense of formal volunteering, was an activity that was hard to access or consider as relevant, often clashing with pre-existing family responsibilities.

The influence of peers

Within a number of focus groups young people drew specific attention to the role played by the views of their peers on the extent and nature of their civic action. Some young people identified the countering influence of peers on more positive perspectives about civic engagement that they had encountered:

> Young participant 1 "So if it [volunteering in the local community] was presented as an option again to us I think a lot of us would do it."
> Young Participant 2 "Yeah but again people do follow other people. So if your friends are not doing it, it puts into your mind I'm not going to go by myself and look like the odd one out … the people I know are not going to do it so we tend to follow other people." (Females Inner City Post 16 College Setting).

However to illustrate the diversity of participants' voices, there were other individual young people who spoke of deliberately choosing to resist the dominant peer culture. For example one young participant stated that he had become involved with a youth action group partly in order to move on from peers who he felt had low aspirations and who he judged to be not doing anything meaningful with their lives.

Faith-based groups

A number of young people identified the positive influence of their faith-based communities when it came to their civic engagement. Some identified that the values and teaching of their faith communities encouraged a more altruistic sense of identity and care for other people. Others perceived that the social setting of their faith-based community provided a conducive and accessible environment for being active and helping others. So for example one young participant within an inner city context identified his mosque as providing a 'civic space' where the different generations could mix and where he could take on helping roles with younger children. Although the influence of a faith community context was only commented upon by a minority of young people within the *EngagED* study, the reported impact is very much in line with the findings of other more substantial studies into the role of faith communities on social capital and youth civic engagement (Annette 2011).

The neighbourhood and the police

Young people's perspectives on how they were viewed individually or as a group in their local communities was identifiable as another contributing factor towards their sense of belonging and their propensity to be interested in civic engagement. Hostile and negative experiences of their neighbourhood, which in some cases extended to police community relations, were a major force of discouragement or justification for active resistance. A de-motivating factor for a few young people was identified to be the strong sense that they personally were constantly under suspicion for being troublemakers.

A commonly identified problem within the inner city contexts was that of gang culture. But whilst many spoke of their concern over its prevalence and its negative impact a few participants risked countering this by speaking personally about the sense of security and belonging it had brought to them personally. It was also a neighbourhood issue that other participants risked sharing more creative responses to. For example, one young person spoke of learning to deal with the tension of growing up surrounded by gang culture by writing poetry about it. What was clearly prevalent within a significant number of focus groups was a strong sense of young people growing up in the midst of a real absence of trust.

School

As has already been highlighted, a range of agencies influence young people's civic identity above and beyond school. However this institution within the landscape of young people lives remains a key influence; and this once again was identified within the *EngagED* focus groups to be something that could have a positive or negative impact.

Some young people's perspectives were of their school or college being a place where they felt a strong sense of community and belonging. They perceived their formal educational institutions to be an opportunity to come in to contact with new and alternative perspectives to those perhaps they regularly encountered through their peers, neighbourhoods or in the media.

An example of this was provided by one group who explained that they were not interested in, or aware of, the value of formal volunteering until they heard a presentation by a local charity worker as part of their college's compulsory active citizenship programme:

> "Didn't you feel you were making a difference as well when they had the speaker in about volunteering? It changed a lot of people's minds and views on community and stuff." (Female Inner City FE College Setting).

Within the same group, participants spoke of their civic horizons being broadened and community perspectives challenged through being expected to take part in a local community service project as part of their formal education:

> "Our group got the chance to work with children with disabilities and stuff, personally I got the chance to work with people I would normally never meet. So some of the boys had learning difficulties. I never met people like that before it was like scary but a new experience at the same time." (Male Inner City FE College Setting).

This raises a significant topic of debate with regard to the place of active citizenship education within formal education and the merits of young people being exposed through the compulsory context of school to perspectives and experiences that otherwise they might not encounter or be able to access.

Other young people however perceived school to be another site of un-democratic experience that was discouraging, negative and sometimes hostile towards their civic participation and voice:

> "In school they don't listen to us…even if you try to get your point of view across they [teachers] won't listen to a thing. They're right." (Female City School Setting).

The institution of school for some focus group participants was somewhere they had little sense of voice within, or belonging towards. These young people presented as 'occupants' rather than 'inhabitants' of their school with low levels of intrinsic motivation towards making a positive civic contribution. These participants complained about the relative lack of available active citizenship roles within the school, such as school council membership being perceived as limited to the chosen few and often involving tokenistic participation.

2.2 Young Citizens and the Exosystem and Macrosystem Levels

As argued by Raffo (2011) when considering young people's interest in civic action and learning it is also important to understand the systemic influence of wider cultural, social, political and economic patterns.

The world of work

An overriding impression from the focus groups was of young people possessing high levels of anxiety and concern over narratives of global recession, rising unemployment and the localised threat of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). Particularly with regard to the older participants, young people spoke of bleak employment prospects and tougher economic conditions ahead placing a sense of pressure to gain a competitive edge by succeeding in the present. Consequently the world of work was identifiable as having an influence over young people's patterns of civic engagement. A common perception of young people was that the initial motivation for peers' formal civic participation was often instrumental self-gain such as improving their curriculum vitae to better compete in the world of work.

The need for part-time employment whilst studying was identified as creating a time pressure that discouraged young people, particularly in Post 16 settings, from participating in certain forms of civic engagement such as voluntary work. Yet despite identifying this contextual pressure and tension the same young people also expressed an awareness that due to the recent economic recession there were significantly fewer part-time work opportunities available locally for inexperienced young people. So they also spoke of having in reality, high levels of free time on their hands and often a sense of boredom through a lack of accessible activities.

Global crisis/global citizenship

Focus group participants consistently demonstrated an engagement with notions of global citizenship and spoke of their awareness about, and concern over, a wide range of global issues. These issues included: war, global economic recession, climate change, child trafficking, pollution, racism, poverty, homelessness and levels of aid to developing countries. This resonates with Martin's (2007) notion of young people today being the 'transition generation' burdened with narratives of global crisis and the awareness that they are a generation growing up in the midst of calls for significant sustainable change. In a number of cases young people expressed a sense of empathy with global others in crisis, such as during the time of the Haiti earthquake when some young people chose to instigate, or take part in, a number of fund raising activities within their secondary school.

In contrast to this expression of global care, other young people reported being pre-occupied with trying to cope with the personal challenges of the immediacy of their surroundings such as coursework deadlines or securing part-time work:

> "They are more like present problems that are happening right now so we have to deal with them right now. Global warming is happening slowly so we tend to go with the ones that are happening right now." (Female Inner City FE College Setting).

Political systems

Within the focus groups a few young participants spoke passionately about representative democratic political processes, expressing concern over being powerless within, or ill informed about, the political systems that impacted upon their lives and communities. Participants in one group focused specifically on being critical about a political elite running the UK today who were not accessible to the average citizen. Participants also commented upon the difficulty of understanding politicians because of the inaccessible language they used. Across many of the focus group settings there was a strong sense of distrust by young people about the motives and character of mainstream politicians.
Young people commonly recognised that politically speaking they were at the mercy of adults, being cautious about what young people by themselves can achieve:

> "We can't do much because all we can do is just state our opinions. Adults have the power to change it because they have money and jobs." (Male City School Setting).

So at one end of the spectrum were young people who expressed a low sense of self efficacy in terms of feeling politically disempowered, discouraged by the perception that young people are without influence in many community decision making arenas. But at the other end of the spectrum were individuals making a political stand for young people's interests, such as one young person who had strived to become a member of the UK youth parliament and who specifically stated her primary aim to be making a difference for her peers and taking part in a movement that meant young people did have a voice.

Stereotypes of young people and the role of the media

A consistent finding across the range of focus group settings was participants' perceptions that they were growing up in the midst of negative stereotypes of young people. As a consequence they spoke of the sense of being met with suspicion and distrust in their daily lives. Although participants felt they continually had to battle against such negative stereotypes the overriding belief was that the primary source of this was not people's encounters with young people themselves but the media:

> "Yeah but the reason they have got those stereotypes is because of the media. Its not because they have seen it themselves. It's because of what they have read or heard on the news, it's not because they have seen an actual young person stab someone else is it?" (Female Inner City FE College Setting).

Again for some young people this meta narrative of young people being negatively stigmatised provided further purpose and motivation for their civic action:

> "I think that they [adult neighbours] are grateful and it gives them a

better view and shows them how teenagers really are – not just the stereotype that everyone's got." (Male City School Setting).

2.3 Young Citizens and the Chronosystem Level

The *EngagED* project was limited in its scope in terms of uncovering the temporal dimension of young people's civic conditions and experiences over time, with its primary focus being upon participants' perceptions of their current context. The study does offer some insight however if the view is taken that an eco-systemic theory of human development at the *chronosystem* level needs to give recognition to young people's perceptions of the future as well as the past. In this way the influence of the temporal dimension is revealed in a number of cases by young people referring to their civic action as being motivated by their sense of 'preferable futures'. This was particularly with regard to vocational aspiration. For example one female participant within an inner city setting explained that her goal was to work in elderly care, so as a stepping-stone towards achieving this she was currently volunteering within a residential care home. Other young people spoke of being motivated by improving conditions for future generations such as this 15 year old male participant who reacted against the view that all young people are motivated to participate in civic action by instrumental self gain, explaining that for him:

> "What it is, even if I help them it would be better for our children and even our children's children. It would be better for, better for the next generation." (Male City School Setting).

Young people generally though presented as having less hopeful perspectives on the probable future of their neighbourhoods. A common notion was one of gradual decline in community life over time, with the behaviour of each generation and the levels of respect between people deteriorating. Similarly they perceived childhood innocence being lost at an increasingly younger age. Some also questioned whether their generation really was providing enough in the way of positive role models for the younger generations to be inspired by in the future:

> "To be honest when they look up to us we are not any better role model to show them. Ok we have been through this now we are more mature. But they haven't found that many people to actually follow…. because we are too much into ourselves to think about the younger generation at this time because we have other stuff on our minds…. to see or look into how the younger generation are getting affected." (Female Inner City FE College Setting).

2.4 Young Citizens and the Mesosystem Level

Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic model places an emphasis upon the

interconnected nature of the different agencies of influence upon the developing lives of young people. A key finding of the *EngagED* research project has been this individualised contextual complexity of participants' lives. This is not only in terms of the range of influential agencies but crucially in the entangled interplay between these different agencies. A useful illustration of this is provided by the following account of a young person's civic engagement experience. Whilst walking home a young person comes across an elderly person who lives in his neighbourhood and who is struggling to carry home her shopping. He has the idea that he could offer to help her. He later reflects that what could have influenced him having this idea was a recent school assembly by a visiting charity worker on 'making a difference where you live,' combined with a religious service that taught about the golden rule of 'treating others as you yourself would wish to be treated.' However as he approaches his neighbour to offer help she appears fearful and suspicious and initially declines his offer. He briefly offers some reassurance and she changes her mind and accepts his help handing over her shopping. As they walk together she talks of regularly hearing on television and reading in newspapers about young people being disrespectful and dangerous concluding that 'you can never be too sure these days.' Having carried her shopping to her doorstep this encounter ends positively with the young person being thanked profusely for his help. But his overriding memory of the whole experience is the initial look of fear on his neighbour's face, and because of this he concludes that if he were in a similar situation again he would not offer to help and just walk on by.

This reflective account of a civic experience offers a useful lens through which the multifarious context of young people's civic engagement is revealed. It points towards the interlinked influence of agencies such as school, faith groups and the mass media fused with the opportunities that are made possible within neighbourhoods. It is the perceptions of the inter-relation of these different agencies and narratives with each other and with the person as an individual human being that has a considerable bearing on a young person's pattern of civic engagement.

2.5 Young Citizens Growing Up in a Complex World

This analysis of the focus group data has revealed the contextual complexity of young people growing up as social agents in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. It has brought to the fore that within this complexity, a diverse range of civic engagement patterns is still able to flourish. In the midst of growing up in a multifaceted context where different agencies of influence are entangled and interconnect in manifold ways with the individual nature, character and dispositions of a young person, a myriad of civic engagement responses remain possible.

The study has revealed young people as perceiving a range of motivations behind their civic engagement. In many cases young people have been able to identify instrumental self-gain motives particularly with regard to achieving vocational aspirations. But this certainly does not capture the entirety of their rationale, with individuals also referring to being motivated

by the personal fulfilment of being able to help someone else. In a number of cases young people expressed compassionate motivations as illustrated by one young person who spoke of regularly helping with an elderly neighbour who suffered from arthritis:

> "I just feel sorry for old people they can't cope not like us they are not as well as I am so if I am there and I can help make something easier for someone then I would want to do that." (Female Inner City Post 16 College Setting).

It would also seem that these motivations can change over time. So whilst some young people might originally be motivated to engage in an organised civic activity for instrumental self gain motives (such as to improve their curriculum vitae), they were aware that they were retained by a far broader range of factors such as the enjoyment of being able to help someone else. This highlights the malleability of civic engagement where change in attitudes and behaviour can occur over the temporal dimension of a civic action.

More generally, the focus groups have afforded an insight into how young people growing up in socio-economically disadvantaged areas are as a group far from apathetic about public life, expressing concern over a wide range of both local and global issues (see also Holden 2007 and Warwick 2008). Listening to young people's voices has highlighted the point that their issues of concern occupy a specific context at a particular time. It has also reinforced the view as expressed by Lister et al. that:

> 'Young people take seriously the question of their relationship to the wider society.' (Lister et al. 2003, 250).

But effective civic engagement with a particular issue of concern or need in the community requires considerable skill and resource. In the face of this difficult challenge the *EngagED* research project has found that young people growing up in socio-economically disadvantaged areas can experience a broad range of barriers to their civic engagement. As identified in the work of Kerr (2005), Benton et al. (2008) and Pattie et al. (2003) these barriers for young people might generally include:

- Resources: particularly a lack of money and sense of free time;
- Civic capital: particularly a lack of knowledge or networks of support to act on an issue of concern;
- Role models for active participation: significant people not valuing, encouraging or inspiring their participation in civic engagement;
- Mobilisation: young people not being asked / invited to take part in civic engagement activities, or not being made aware that opportunities exists.

As Raffo (2011) identifies, what cannot be under-estimated is the impact upon young people's civic identities of growing up in socio-economically disadvantaged areas and being immersed within conditions of inequality and social exclusion. The overriding experience within the *EngagED* study has been of meeting young people who reveal how difficult it is to acquire the responsibility, skills, resources, support and space that civic engagement

actually requires.

3 Developing Pre–Figurative Practice in Civic Pedagogy

When considering the role of educators in supporting the civic action and learning of young people the *EngagED* focus group findings point towards the need for a person-centred and relational approach. Educators concerned with providing young people with engaging and apt learning spaces for civic engagement need to be aware of the diverse lived realities of their students (Fahmy 2006). In the midst of such complexity and diversity it is impossible for an educator to construct apt civic learning opportunities outside of relationships with the students or outside of deep knowledge of their contexts.

The *EngagED* research project sought to respond to this conclusion and worked in partnership with a number of schools and community organisations to develop new civic learning opportunities, very much in line with the concept of pre-figurative practice (Fielding, Moss 2011). This is where educators work together in pursuit of exemplifying and embodying viable and desirable radical alternatives, 'releasing the imagination of what could be' through creative experimentation. The result of this approach was innovation at a local level via two pedagogical methods: photo-voice and collaborative community action.

The photo-voice initiative

   "People don't really listen to kids." (Female City School Setting).

A 'photo-voice initiative' was developed in order to create a new civic learning space where young people's voices about their community life were listened to in more effective and inclusive ways. This approach offered young people, that may not usually be heard, the opportunity to voice their perspectives through visual methods.

Photo-voice projects were conducted within four settings: two secondary schools, one community organisation and one community group. Each initiative required negotiation and adaptation with partner institutions and so varied slightly in the range and extent of activities. The most comprehensive implementation of the photo-voice project was with a group of Year 10 Art students in a rural secondary school. Following a training session by the project team and a professional photographer each young person was given a disposable camera and asked to take photographs of their local area. Participants were asked to take photographs that showed:

- Issues that mattered to them;
- Aspects of their neighbourhood that they were proud of, bothered about or annoyed by;
- Problems they would like to change;

- Ideas about how art could change things and make them better;
- Barriers that personally stop them making a difference.

Having taken the photographs the young people were then invited to select and edit a series of images that they wished to work with in order to produce a piece of artwork that communicated key messages with regard to their perception of the local community. Throughout the whole creative process participants were supported by school staff from the Art Department. Their artwork was then exhibited in the school serving as a stimulus for discussion and deliberation with both peers and teachers.

The collaborative community action initiative

> "I think if we work together we do have power to make a lot of changes." (Male Youth Action Group Setting).

This practice innovation built upon young people's creative capacity and facilitated their critical learning through collaborative efforts to bring about change in their communities. Drawing from youth participatory action research models and service learning theory (Stanton et al. 1999; Gelmon, Billig 2007; Butin 2010) this initiative aimed to embody a range of participatory pedagogies as conceptualised by Hart (1997) and Fielding (2010). It gave credence to a variety of active learning roles that young people can adopt within a citizenship education context (Mayo, Annette 2010) providing opportunities for young people to cooperatively act as enquirers, knowledge creators and change leaders. Conducted within two secondary schools each pilot required flexibility in order to navigate the complexity of the different institutional contexts. The most comprehensive implementation was with a group of Year 10 citizenship education students in an inner city school and covered core elements such as; young people consulting with one another to identify common community issues of concern, critical thinking around these issues to question and scrutinise alternative perspectives, creative collaboration to imagine a restorative or sustainable community action, and project leadership to put their ideas into action. The initiative jointly developed by the project team and staff from the school's citizenship department gave regular space to the participants for reflection on, and discussion about, their active citizenship experiences.
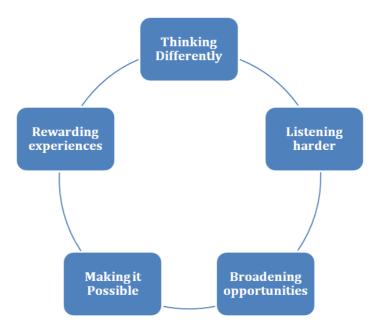
3.1 The Civic Pedagogue – Key Principles

Reflecting upon these examples of pre-figurative practice in civic education we tentatively suggest here a set of key principles to guide the 'civic pedagogue' in creating apt learning spaces for supporting and encouraging young people learning through civic engagement. These hybrid learning spaces cut across the traditions of both formal and informal educational provision and place considerable demands upon the educator in terms of facilitating contextualised and personally responsive learning opportunities.

These five principles, as shown in Figure 2, build upon more holistic notions of professional learning for educators as represented in emerging approaches to the professionalization of the 'social pedagogue' within many European educational systems (Cameron, Moss 2011). They also build upon recent progressive advancements in civic pedagogy and teacher education within the UK in response to the introduction of citizenship education as a statutory subject within secondary schools (Leighton 2012). But what is being argued for here is a radical approach to civic education and a notion of a facilitatory educator who supports and encourages young people as they seek to overcome the dominant exclusionary culture that they may indeed face. It is through the embodiment of these five principles that educators are able to create learning spaces that recognise and seek to support young people 'as' citizens rather than try to 'transform' them into good future citizens.

Figure 2. Five fundamental principles for the civic pedagogue

Thinking Differently

> "It's like we've been branded with this name of yobs and riff raff, and we're not all yobs. We're all individual at the end of the day...... we're all entitled to be different." (Male Community Group setting).

A key challenge for the civic pedagogue is to let go of control to some extent and find authentic ways to support young people as active citizens; responding to their unique perspectives, enabling their particular skills, talents and visions for the future. In order to work against the forces of social exclusion that can act on young people from socio-economically disadvantaged communities, civic pedagogues need to be prepared to innovate within their practice; open to the challenge of negotiating flexible

ways of working with young people in order to facilitate critical, reflective and reflexive civic engagement. Civic pedagogues need to consistently work with young people in a personalised way – recognising their unique identity as well as the spatial and temporal context. Many civic action projects traditionally offer young people the opportunity to participate in adult-initiated activities that can offer few opportunities for young people to influence and lead (Benton et al 2008, Hart 1997). The *EngagED* research project has consistently encountered young people who hold insightful perspectives about what matters where they live and creative ideas about how aspects of community living could be changed for the better.

Listening Harder

> "I think school should like ask people like what do you care about, and then they should arrange for them to help out with things they actually want to do." (Female City Youth Group Setting).

A key principle for the civic pedagogue is to find dialogic and inclusive ways of working with young people growing up in socio-economically disadvantaged areas in order to access their voices and appreciate their diverse and personal perspectives. Despite many laudable efforts to elicit the voices of young people, recent research shows that this has not always led to young people actually affecting the decisions they have been asked to be involved in (Benton et al 2008, Rudduck, Fielding 2006).

Young people are far more likely to civically engage and to offer their ideas and views when they believe that their voice matters, and that what they say is of importance and will be acted upon. Providing learning spaces that authentically demonstrate this is crucial since active citizenship educational experiences where young people's voices are ultimately ignored actually runs the risk of increasing participants' sense of alienation or lack of personal efficacy. Listening harder also requires of the civic pedagogue that they adopt creative methods that allow all young people a voice, not just those who are articulate and confident to share their views. Achieving this in practice could be helped by the developmental work that is currently being undertaken in the areas of photo and visual voice methodology that have the potential to offer more inclusive approaches in the future (Daw 2011; Cremin et al. 2011).

Broadening Opportunities

> "A lot of people would think it's [volunteering] … once you've... you know retired. That's the thing you do to fill your time." (Male Community Group Setting).

When seeking to facilitate the community action and learning of young people living in socio-economically disadvantaged areas the civic pedagogue requires a broad notion of what amounts to civic engagement. If the definition of civic action is broadly taken to be a positive contribution

towards the 'common good' then all forms this could possibly take for young people in their global and digitalised worlds need to be recognised; not just those that can be easily categorised, identified or celebrated. The *EngagED* research project has highlighted that some young people have no access to 'formal volunteering' opportunities or feel that this form of engagement fails to resonate with their sense of civic identity, perceiving it to be an activity done by people who are very different to themselves. So a real danger is that young citizens can actually be dissuaded from civic action by the use of language and ideas that do not reflect their identity or how they would like to be perceived by others, especially their peers.

So a key principle for the civic pedagogue it to acknowledge the pressures young people are under and discern what are the civic engagement opportunities that are relevant to their interests. So as Percy-Smith argues:

> 'It is now time to re-think children's and young people's participation in light of critical reflection on experiences in practice and the promises of radical discourses past, present and emerging..........we need to pay more attention to opportunities for children and young people to participate more fully in everyday community settings –home, school, neighbourhood – through the actions, choices, relationships and contributions they make, rather than being preoccupied with participation in political and public decision-making processes in organisations and systems that are removed from young people's everyday lives.' (Percy-Smith 2010, 109).

Making It Possible

> "I have not volunteered because I don't know how to go about it." (Female City Youth Group Setting).

Young people living in socio-economically disadvantaged areas are at considerable risk of facing greater barriers when seeking to take action in their communities. A key task for the civic pedagogue is to create the space to encourage young people realising their civic action potential by attempting to identify specific issues and barriers that discourage young people and identify apt and creative responses to help support young people to overcome them. Consistently within the *EngagED* project young people have been encountered as being far from apathetic; expressing interest and concern over a wide variety of local and global issues. Significantly what young people showed much less awareness about was organisations and people that were making a positive difference to these issues and that could serve as locally accessible agencies of inspiration and hope. The civic pedagogue has a key role to play in contributing to mapping the multitude of positive change agents that exist or are accessible locally. This networking helps young people realise that from their sense of compassion or dissatisfaction, support for change can be accessed. The civic pedagogue also needs to mobilise civic engagement by offering young people regular and consistent invitation. In support of this view a study by Pye et al. (2009) found that over 2,000,000 young people in the UK might consider volunteering on a regular basis if they were simply asked. Their report

suggests that young people may not be initially self-motivated to take on volunteering or community service opportunities, but would seriously consider doing so if they were asked and given guidance or encouragement to do so.

Rewarding Experiences

"It's inspired me to do a lot more work now that I've seen what actually happens because I just…I literally did it for my CV and then when I got involved I was like 'Oh this is actually really fun' and it's something you can do." (Male City Youth Group Setting).

Successfully engaging young people in civic action is important because of the positive opportunities it presents for both individuals and their communities, and yet often these benefits remain obscured. Clearly for some young people if they do not feel they will personally gain in any way from becoming civically engaged they are unlikely to take that first step. Similarly if they cannot see any gains being made whilst they are involved they are unlikely to sustain their involvement. In order to recruit and retain young people, potential benefits such as developing life skills, character and relationships, achieving accreditation or personal enjoyment etc need to be made explicit and celebrated. In facilitating civic learning spaces a key role of the civic pedagogue is to support young people in reflecting upon what they have been able to gain from their experiences, providing the reflexive and evaluative space this requires. Arguably helping young people to recognise what has been learnt through civic action could have a significant impact upon their sense of self-efficacy. It could also be argued that celebrating success and giving public recognition can play an important societal role at the current time in terms of providing inspirational narratives that challenge negative stereotypes of young people.

In all this the role of the civic pedagogue is to develop their practice in relationship with the specific young people being worked with. So for example, within one inner city focus group setting, unexpected viewpoints were encountered around the issue of recognition for active citizenship. Within this group they expressed the view that it was not particularly important in terms of their motivation for a volunteering/community action to be accredited or to receive some kind of certificate of recognition. Instead they spoke of being motivated by opportunities where they felt they would be appreciated by the people they were working with, where they could take part within their friendship groups and where they felt it was not only fun but also made a tangible difference to someone else. This illustrates once again the overriding impression that civic learning spaces need to be co-constructed *with* young people in order to be apt.

4 Conclusion

At a time of seeming reduction in political support for citizenship education

as a statutory subject in schools in England, the civic engagement and learning of young people growing up in socio-economically disadvantaged areas remains a pressing issue of concern. State-led moves towards a more diverse provision, including informal and community based approaches, such as is represented by the National Citizens Service initiative, hold some potential but are coming under increasing criticism. This study has found young people, especially those growing up in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, face a myriad of contextual barriers, obstacles and points of resistance when it comes to their civic engagement. It has also drawn attention to the view that civic engagement demands responsibility, skills and resources that are hard for young people to acquire. If the provision of civic learning opportunities is taken away from the core educational entitlement within schools this could have a detrimental impact upon significant numbers of young people and their ability to take part in the localised decision making processes currently being promoted by the British government.

The *EngagED* research project has also encountered the unique individuality of young people and their capacity to be compassionate, resilient, resourceful and creative. Civic education needs to be able to reach beyond the classroom and to better connect with young people's sites of community and sense of belonging. The challenge of this role means that professional learning opportunities for civic educators remain of paramount importance. The complex ecologies of young people's lives today necessitate educators that are able to personally relate and empathise with young people's community contexts whilst facilitating active, reflective and reflexive civic learning opportunities. Through the lessons learnt in experimenting with pre-figurative practice this paper has proposed a set of key principles for how civic educators might move towards practice that facilitates such new learning spaces. The 'civic pedagogue' has a vital facilitatory role to play and unique professional learning needs if they are going to be successful in exemplifying a paradigm shift away from educational strategies to 'transform' young people into good citizens, towards finding ways of supporting them 'as' citizens.

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