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Civic Activism, Engagement and Education: Issues and Trends

Keywords

Education, activism, engagement, citizenship

1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

2 Characterising the fields of civic activism, engagement and education

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



4 The 'location' of civic activism and engagement

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

6 Investigating civic activism, engagement and education

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

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

7 Summary of articles

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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