



Pedagogies for active citizenship: Learning through affective and cognitive domains for deeper democratic engagement

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Active citizenship requires learning across both affective and cognitive domains.
- Critical pedagogy and Deweyan theory underpins critical, transformative citizenship.
- Teacher expertise is required for deep learning in active citizenship education.

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a two-year study that explored teachers' pedagogical approaches when implementing an active citizenship curriculum initiative in New Zealand. Our aim was to identify pedagogies which afforded potential for critical and transformative citizenship learning. We define critical and transformative social action through a fusion of critical pedagogy and Dewey's notion of democratic education. Data included teachers' classroom-based research as well as classroom observations and interviews with students. Our study suggested that citizenship learning through both affective and cognitive domains can provide for deeper opportunities for students to experience critical and transformative democratic engagement.

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1. Introduction

In recent years there has been an increased emphasis in citizenship education curricula in many countries on young people not only knowing *about* civic processes, but also *participating* as active citizens (Nelson & Kerr, 2006; Ross, 2012; Youniss & Levine, 2009). This has led to a raft of educational and community policy initiatives that encourage young people to participate in acts of citizenship – through, for example, service learning, community participation, social action, and volunteering. Underlying such active citizenship initiatives is an assumption that teaching students about citizenship and offering them opportunities to

participate in their communities will lead to future civic engagement. Yet, there is no guarantee that what teachers teach, is what students learn (Biesta, 2011). In addition, despite the 'explosion' (Brooks & Holford, 2009, p. 85) of citizenship literature and initiatives, there is a paucity of research about the ways in which young people actually learn about democracy (Biesta, 2011; Biesta, Lawy, & Kelly, 2009) the role that teachers play in citizenship education (Sim, Chua, & Krishnasamy, 2017), and the types of learning experiences, practices and strategies that enable young people to actually *be* critical and creative democratic citizens.

In this paper we explore teachers' pedagogical strategies and practices to identify approaches with potential to provide critical and transformative citizenship learning in the context of a mainstream curriculum programme. We draw on two-years of in-depth research into a curriculum initiative in New Zealand [NZ] that requires students to undertake 'personal social action' in their social studies learning. While NZ has a long history of social action within the social studies curriculum since its inception post World War II

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(Wood & Milligan, 2016; Wood, Taylor & Atkins, 2013), this requirement for high school social studies students in Years 11–13 (ages 15–18) to actually *undertake* social action is a recent initiative—introduced in 2013. Our research interest was whether students' social action within this initiative had the potential to be critical and transformative. Prior international research has highlighted the tendency for participatory youth initiatives to occur within community and after-school programmes and only much more rarely within the formal classroom curricula in mainstream schooling (Hampden-Thompson et al., 2015; Levinson, 2012; Rubin, Ayala, & Zaal, 2017). When integration in mainstream schooling does occur, school-based programmes to stick to 'safe', 'acceptable' and 'minimal' (McLaughlin, 1992) forms of civic action, such as 'fundraising, fasting and having fun' (Bryan, 2011), recycling, planting trees or supporting established community organisations (such as a Foodbank). Much less frequently do young people participate in 'justice-oriented' forms of active citizenship which challenge the status quo (Akar, 2012; Kahne & Westheimer, 2006; Levinson, 2012; Sim et al., 2017; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Given these tendencies towards 'minimal' forms of active citizenship within schooling contexts, our research aimed to identify pedagogical approaches which have the potential to promote critical and transformative citizenship actions.

The notion of 'active' citizenship is not clearly or consistently defined across countries (Kennedy, Hahn, & Lee, 2007; Nelson & Kerr, 2006; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010). For example, an international thematic study of active citizenship involving twenty countries found that there was a lack of clarity and understanding about the term and how it was applied in policy and practice (Nelson & Kerr, 2006). Participants in this study broadly agreed it was about participation and engagement, but examples given ranged between liberal, communitarian and civic-republican theoretical positions and included both 'active' and 'passive' responses. How young people themselves define and practice active citizenship also has been found to differ significantly between countries. For example, a study comparing young people in Australia, the US and Hong Kong found that in both the US and Hong Kong, young people valued volunteering, community service and social movements highly, whereas the Australian young people showed lower levels of support for these actions (Kennedy et al., 2007). While context and culture could account for some of these differences, Kennedy et al. comment that the complexity of citizenship conceptions and practice needs much deeper research if we are to understand these differences.

Given this ambiguity, the focus of our study on 'critical and transformative' citizenship required a clearly outlined position to account for our approach and analysis. We understood 'social action', which is the term used in New Zealand curriculum documents, to largely equate with 'active citizenship', or "acts that can occur, either individually or collectively, that are intrinsically concerned with shaping the society we want to live in" (Vromen, 2003, pp. 82–83). In order to deepen this to the type of critical and transformative citizenship we wished to aim for and explore, we begin the paper by outlining how we interpret this stance theoretically. We then provide an overview of previous research on 'effective' pedagogies for active citizenship in formal education. Turning to empirical evidence from both teachers and students in our project, we report on two domains which, based on our research we argue require development for more transformative forms of citizenship action to occur: *affective*, and *cognitive* domains. We argue that approaches which combine learning within and across these domains can provide for deeper opportunities for affective engagement, critical knowledge, societal inquiry, and the development of a suite of civic skills for authentic engagement in schooling contexts.

2. Theorising critical and transformative active citizenship

Our conceptualisation of critical and transformative citizenship education drew on several prior models that have been developed to evaluate the nature of citizenship education and the types of citizen that it tends to promote (e.g. Johnson & Morris, 2010; McLaughlin, 1992; Veugelers, 2007; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Broadly, these models suggest a spectrum of conceptions of active citizenship. At one end are *minimal* approaches, which include 'personally responsible' types of actions such as obeying the law, paying taxes and being 'public spirited'. A more active form of citizenship than this is described by Westheimer and Kahne (2004) as 'participatory' citizens who are active community members who volunteer and take on leadership and initiative within established systems and structures. At the other end of the spectrum are more *maximal* approaches that Westheimer and Kahne (2004) refer to as 'justice-oriented' citizens. 'Justice-oriented' citizens hold a concern for social justice, a desire to improve society and question structural factors that perpetuate injustices (Johnson & Morris, 2010; McLaughlin, 1992; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Our interpretation of transformative and critical citizenship is positioned at this 'maximal' end of the spectrum where the aim is to equip students with the ability to critically analyse society and address social issues and injustices. Critical and transformative approaches raise issues of membership and identity and challenge societal norms which reinforce the exclusion of some groups in society (Abowitz and Harnish (2006).

To theorise this 'maximal', justice-oriented understanding of critical, transformative and active citizenship, we applied ideas derived from critical theory and critical pedagogy, as espoused by authors such as Freire (1973), Giroux (1997), and McLaren and Kincheloe (2009). These authors outline a pedagogy centred on a critique of power relations and social injustice in society with a goal of sustainable social transformation. Paulo Freire's ideas were especially fruitful when developing pedagogical approaches for critical and transformative forms of active citizenship. With a specific focus on the ways society operates to perpetuate the dominance of some groups over others, Freire developed a theory of *praxis*, a process of reflection and action by people upon the world in order to transform it. Through praxis and dialogue, students develop a critical consciousness (*conscientization*) in which they encounter "problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world", or what Freire (1973) called "generative themes" (p. 62). Freire argued that through a process of conscientization which exposes injustice and power inequalities, students "feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge" (p. 62). Freire's emancipatory educational theory has infused approaches such as participatory action research [PAR] and 'action civics' (Levinson, 2012).

While the dominant tenets underpinning our conceptualisation of critical and transformative social action came from ideas of critical pedagogy posited by Freire and others, we also drew from traditions of progressive educators who advocate for child-centred and experience-based approaches which promote the ability to envision, articulate, and act towards a better world (Westheimer & Kahne, 2002). In particular, Dewey's articulation of democratic education which aims to provide "individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder" (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 99) was especially generative. Notably, such an education required "a genuine situation of experience" in order to develop stimuli for thought and solutions which could be tested for validity (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 163). For Dewey, this commitment to 'real world' or authentic contexts for learning is pivotal for forming students' political orientations as well as encouraging meaningful

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