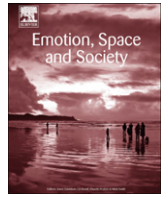


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Young people's emotional geographies of citizenship participation: Spatial and relational insights

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ABSTRACT

The inclusion of more 'active' citizenship concepts within citizenship curricula has been a pattern noted in many countries in recent years. Yet, rarely are young people's citizenship identities, and how these are shaped by emotional and relational experiences of *being* citizens in communities considered in such curricula. In this paper, I explore the citizenship narratives of young people from two New Zealand high schools and examine how emotions formed a significant aspect of their citizenship perceptions and participation. These emotions were constituted in and through relations and non-relations with other young people at school, as well as with members of their local communities at various inter-locking spatial scales. Focusing on emotional geographies of citizenship participation offered insights into how young people were forming their citizenship identities at the intersection of their geographies of gender, race and class, and how these experiences shaped, motivated and sustained citizenship participation. The study highlights the complexity of young people's emotional experiences in relation to their citizenship identities and participation and the need to understand this affectivity in greater depth, especially within policy contexts.

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1. Introduction

In light of what many perceive as an emerging 'democratic deficit', governments in a many countries have viewed compulsory citizenship curricula as a key way to promote a more engaged and informed citizenry. In recent years, the verb 'active' has increasingly been added to the term 'citizenship education' (Ross, 2012) not only to encourage young people to learn *about* civics and citizenship, but also, increasingly, to *participate* as citizens (Nelson and Kerr, 2006; Ireland et al., 2006). While firm definitions of active citizenship remain elusive, active citizenship generally includes 'a more participatory form of citizenship which involves the development of citizenship education as an active process in a range of contexts in and beyond schools' (Nelson and Kerr, 2006: iv). The result is that students are expected to 'perform' (Pells, 2010) their citizenship through, for example, community involvement, volunteering, fund-raising, leadership roles and service activities.

Yet, rarely are children and young people's citizenship identities, and how these are constituted through emotional and relational experiences of *being* citizens in communities considered in such

curricula. While citizenship has frequently been recognised as status (an entitlement to rights) and practice (a set of duties), Osler and Starkey (2005: 9) suggest that it is 'probably most immediately experienced as a feeling of belonging' (p. 9). However, when participation becomes policy through citizenship curricula, it gains a level of normativity by placing an expectation on all students that they *will* participate as citizens as part of their curriculum requirements. Such requirements are frequently divorced from emotions, places of meaning and pre-established social relationships and thus employ abstract notions of belonging that overlook the highly variegated ways that citizenship is understood and experienced within diverse communities (Kennelly and Dillabough, 2009; Nayak, 2011). The normativity of participation assumed by citizenship curricula policies ignores the centrality of emotive, affective and embodied citizenship responses that are intricately tied to spatial and cultural landscapes. Moreover, the one-size-fits-all model of citizenship participation presented in such curricula obscures the way in which differentials in citizenship identities and experiences, whether through axes of gender, class, race or age, shape how young people define and access participatory opportunities (Pykett, 2006; Wood, in press). The failure to consider heterogeneous and emotional aspects of citizenship participation opens wide the potential for participation under duress, participation for the purpose of enhancing the Curriculum Vitae (Brooks,

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2007), or, participation narrowly demarcated along neoliberal lines of acceptability, accountability and entrepreneurship (Annette, 2009).

In this paper, I consider the value of exploring affective and emotive responses to the educational policy requirements for young people to 'participate' as citizens. Rather than viewing emotional relations as something apart from the civic-political and policy realm, my approach builds on an understanding that emotions form a significant aspect of the experience of being a citizen and participating in society (Ho, 2009; Jupp, 2008; Osler and Starkey, 2005). The central aim of this paper is to draw attention to the significance and complexity of young people's emotional responses to compulsory citizenship curriculum, and to highlight the potential for emotions to reveal 'ways of knowing, being and doing in the broadest sense' (Anderson and Smith, 2001: 8). In doing so, I wish to challenge abstract notions of belonging which frequently underpin citizenship curricula requirements for citizenship participation and civic responsibility. If, as Massey (2004) suggests, responsibility is derived from relations through which identity is constructed, then it is of paramount importance to pay attention to how young people construct their citizenship identities within spatial and social contexts, and through material and relational practices with families, schools and communities (see also, Massey, 1992, 2005).

The paper begins with an examination of 'active citizenship' curriculum policies, looking at particular at the New Zealand curriculum, and the attention this educational policy gives to emotions and the 'feeling of participation' (Jupp, 2008). Rather than relegating emotions 'to the side' (Thrift, 2004) of this discussion, I employ an approach informed by feminist theory which seeks to draw attention to the everyday citizenship experiences and practices of young people – a group relegated in society by their age as citizens-in-the-making, rather than citizens now (Lister, 2007; Weller, 2003, 2007). Through an analysis of two narratives involving New Zealand young people, I discuss how their citizenship participation was intricately linked to their lived emotional and relational experiences of belonging in communities. I suggest that focusing on the emotional geographies of citizenship participation offers the potential to rethink citizenship participation through young people's eyes, and provides opportunities to consider how emotions can serve to spark, shape and sustain citizenship practices.

1.1. Feelings, participation and public policy

This research focuses on the active citizenship components of the current New Zealand Curriculum which was released in 2007 (Ministry of Education, 2007). This New Zealand curriculum was endorsed by the New Zealand Electoral Commission (2007) for its 'strong focus on citizenship' and has been praised internationally for its inclusion of citizenship as an active process 'for all young people both through the curriculum, in the culture of the school and in the wider community beyond' (Nelson and Kerr, 2006: 9). The most specific requirements of active citizenship are found within the compulsory social studies curriculum which states that students 'will explore how societies work and how they themselves can participate and take action as critical, informed, and responsible citizens' (Ministry of Education, 2007: 17). My research focused particularly on this social studies curriculum and how both social studies students and their teachers understood and enacted these ideas of active citizenship.

While emotional geographies of participation were not a strong focus at the outset of my research, it became apparent that young people's emotions were inextricably linked to not only their citizenship responses, but also to their experiences of living, belonging

and participating as citizens in specific geographic locations. Furthermore, the feelings associated with their citizenship identities were closely linked to their participatory citizenship responses. Yet, an examination of this New Zealand curriculum reveals only one place where emotions are linked to participation – this states:

Students who participate and contribute in communities have a sense of belonging and the confidence to participate within new contexts. (Ministry of Education, 2007: 13)

While this statement highlights the often overlooked component of belonging and citizenship, the causal connection between inclusion and positive citizenship participation overlooks legal restrictions and discriminatory practices which effectively exclude many marginalised groups (such as children and young people) from both a sense of 'belonging' and the desire/ability to fully participate as citizens in communities (Weller, 2003). Furthermore, in its simplicity, such a statement fails to consider how multiple and varied experiences of *being* a citizen (including experiences of marginalisation or exclusion), can result in unpredictable patterns of citizenship participation that are far from causal or linear, and indeed, closely mediated by emotions.

The complexity and centrality of emotions in sparking and sustaining politicised dispositions and consciousness has been drawn to our attention by a number of authors in recent times (Brown and Pickerill, 2009; Thrift, 2004; Williams, 2001). However, Horton and Kraftl (2009: 2986) argue that a 'peculiar separation – even, perhaps, a *separatism*' is too often evident between policy-relevant social science research and work concerned with investigations of emotion and affect. The lack of attention to emotions within policy research is, in part, because policy study is seen primarily as a 'public', whereas emotions are regarded as 'private' and therefore not linked to the public/policy sphere (Anderson and Smith, 2001). Moreover, Anderson and Smith (2001, 7) suggest that the gendered basis of knowledge production is probably another key reason why emotions have frequently been 'banished' from social science, as emotions have often been feminized and devalued in the face of more objective and 'masculinized' knowledge. This dichotomy overlooks the complex relationship between policies and emotions, and how these play out within specific contexts and at different scales (Horton and Kraftl, 2009; Nairn and Higgins, 2011).

This paper contributes to a small but growing body of research which attempts to examine how emotions are intertwined with participatory citizenship responses to policies and social change (Horton and Kraftl, 2009; Jupp, 2008, 2012; Kearns and Collins, 2012). Such research has highlighted the significance of emotions in everyday relational interchanges and place-based attachments to communities in shaping participatory responses. For example, Jupp's (2008) research on the 'feeling' of local community participation highlighted how an examination of small-scale interactions and everyday feelings generated individual and group empowerment and brought about possibilities for social transformation. Kearns and Collins (2012) New Zealand-based research on a community's 'feeling' for the coast is also instructive here. They found that the strong affective bonds between people and beaches generated a collective community mobilisation to protect their coastal landscape that was under threat from development. They argue that 'feelings play a fundamental role in shaping place-based experience...and can form the basis for co-operation and a common sense of purpose at the community scale' (p. 15). Paying closer attention to and multiplicity of emotions associated with citizenship participation may provide opportunities to widen the definitions of what might constitute political engagement and help us to re-examine the meanings of both citizenship and participation.

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