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School ethnic diversity and White students' civic attitudes in England



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ABSTRACT

The current paper focuses on White British students in lower secondary education and investigates the effect of school ethnic diversity on their levels of trust and inclusive attitudes towards immigrants. Use is made of panel data of the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS) to explore these relationships. Ethnic diversity is measured with the proportion of students in a grade identifying with a minority. In agreement with contact theory, the paper initially finds a positive relation between diversity and inclusive attitudes on immigrants. However, this link disappears once controls for social background, gender and prior levels of the outcome are included in the model. This indicates that students with particular pre-enrolment characteristics have self-selected in diverse schools and that inclusive attitudes have stabilized before secondary education. Diversity further appears to have a negative impact on trust, irrespective of the number of controls added to the model.

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1. Introduction

England's population, as that of other affluent Western countries and regions, has become increasingly ethnically diverse over the last three decades due to immigration, family reunion and the natural reproduction of immigrant families. While in 1991 just 7% identified with an ethnic group other than White, by 2011 14% did so (Jivraj, 2012). As people of immigrant background typically have a younger age profile than the ethnic majority, ethnic heterogeneity is a particularly salient phenomenon among the school population: in the early 2000s 15.1% of children in primary schools and 13.1% of those in secondary education identified as non-White compared to 9.1% in the whole population of England (Bhattacharyya et al., 2003).

This raises the question how the native majority is responding to this increasing diversity. Does diversity enhance White British students' understanding and sympathy for the ethnic other or does it make them fearful and hostile towards ethnic out-groups? Upon close inspection most of the educational research on the non-cognitive outcomes of diversity focusses on a single outcome, such as tolerance, trust, interethnic friendships or participation (e.g. Campbell, 2007; Dinesen, 2011; Kokkonen et al., 2011; Dejaeghere et al., 2012), when each of these outcomes can be seen as a component of social cohesion, social capital or civic culture more broadly. The drawback of such research is that it leaves us guessing as to whether some positive or negative impact of diversity on one component can be generalised to other components associated with these phenomena. Despite some evidence that diversity indeed has the same effect on a number of indices of social capital and civic culture (e.g. Putnam, 2007), there is reason to explore this further in view of the critique that social capital, social cohesion and civic culture are notoriously incoherent multidimensional concepts, implying that its alleged attributes need not

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always be strongly inter-correlated (Jackman and Miller, 2005; Green et al., 2006; Morales, 2013). If these attributes are not strongly linked with one another, why should diversity have the same effect on them?

Another drawback of existing research on the non-cognitive effects of diversity in educational contexts is that it has, with few exceptions (e.g. Keating and Benton, 2013; Dejaeghere et al., 2012), relied on cross-sectional data. Such research has not been able to address the problem of reverse causation or to assess lagged effects of diversity and the effect of changes in diversity. In educational contexts reverse causation (i.e. the ‘outcome’ of diversity producing diversity rather than diversity yielding the outcome) often concerns the so-called selection effect. This effect points to the phenomenon of students with particular characteristics from the onset enrolling in particular schools, say White students with high levels of tolerance disproportionately entering diverse schools – or, which seems more likely, intolerant White parents sending their children to all-White schools. Any observed link between school ethnic diversity and a presumed outcome (say tolerance) can wholly or partly reflect such an effect. Selection effects can be explored with longitudinal data, particularly if such data includes measures of the outcome prior to school enrolment. Studies finding selection effects have proposed that tolerance and other civic dispositions are the product of early childhood socialization experiences and change little thereafter (Persson, 2012; Lancee and Sarrasin, 2013).

The present study examines the effect of school ethnic diversity on the civic attitudes of White British students in England. It deals with the two shortcomings identified above. It addresses the first one by focussing on two outcomes generally considered to be typical civic qualities buttressing liberal democracy: inclusive attitudes towards immigrants and social trust.

Inclusive attitudes refer to the belief that immigrants are entitled to the same rights and opportunities as the native population. If people are unwilling to extend civil rights to immigrants and their offspring (that is if they hold exclusionary views), ethnic tensions may arise threatening the democratic order (Scheepers et al., 2002). Although inclusive beliefs need to be distinguished from ethnic tolerance and favourable out-group attitudes, the three concepts have been found to be strongly related (e.g. Brewer, 1986; Scheepers et al., 2002), suggesting that they are all manifestations of a similar latent phenomenon, the antonyms of which are prejudice, racism and ethnocentrism (Dejaeghere et al., 2012, p. 11).

Trust in fellow citizens has also been identified as a key ingredient of stable democratic rule because of its ability to facilitate cooperation and foster a commitment to democratic values (Putnam, 1993; Newton, 2001). In addition, social trust has been said to yield a wide range of other societal benefits, such as economic growth (Knack and Keefer, 1997), innovation (Osberg, 2003) and public health (Wilkinson, 1996). Another reason for focussing on these outcomes is that ethnic diversity has been argued to influence these qualities in very different ways, as the next section will discuss in detail.

The second shortcoming is addressed through the use of a longitudinal data source, the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS). I note that the current study builds on a previous study (Keating and Benton, 2013), which has used the same data source to examine how diversity, deprivation and other school characteristics are related to a variety of outcomes associated with community cohesion. It found school diversity not to be significantly related to tolerance and trust, leading the authors to conclude that “school diversity has little bearing on community cohesion outcomes” (*ibid.*, p. 14).

Although Keating and Benton also sought to address selection effects by including prior measures of the outcome in their models, they did not clarify whether the non-effects of diversity that they found represented selection effects. Neither did they explore how changeable the outcomes of interest were over a period of four school years, whether diversity had an immediate or a lagged effect or whether changes in diversity had a distinct effect. Utilizing the full potential of the CELS panel data, the current study addresses these remaining questions. The following will also show that my more elaborate and detailed exploration of school diversity yields results which somewhat depart from those of Keating and Benton.

2. Inclusive attitudes, social trust and the effect of diversity

How are inclusive attitudes related to social trust? If they are strongly interlinked, diversity is likely to have the same effect on each of them. The literature suggests the link between trust and inclusivity depends on the nature of trust. If trust is generalized, that is if it is directed outwards and concerns confidence in strangers and members of out-groups, it is likely to be positively related to tolerance and inclusion. By contrast, if it is of the particularized kind, reflecting people you know (family and friends) and who are similar to you (people of the same ethnic or religious group), it is bound to be at odds with inclusive attitudes (Putnam, 2000; Uslaner, 2002; Stolle and Hooghe, 2004). Scholars seeking to demonstrate the existence of a civic democratic culture have the former in mind when they talk about trust as the source or companion of other components of this culture, such as inclusiveness, public spiritedness and civic and political participation (Delhey et al., 2011). However, the tried and tested item “most people can be trusted/you cannot be too careful”, which is used in many surveys to capture generalised trust, does not explain how wide the circle of people is that is referred to by the words “most people”. Whether it serves as a good measure of generalised trust is thus debatable (*ibid.*). Moreover, research that has identified a syndrome of trust that might be labelled ‘generalised’ found that it correlated positively with a syndrome of particularised trust (Uslaner, 2002), which compromises the theoretical distinction between the two forms of trust. Thus, uncertainty continues regarding the concepts of generalised and particularised trust and their proposed links with inclusivity.

An interesting parallel between inclusivity and trust is that early childhood has been identified as a crucial formative period for both of them. The idea that parental upbringing fundamentally shapes tolerance and inclusiveness can be traced back to the work of Adorno (1969) on the authoritarian personality. In essence this theory holds that parents who raise their

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