

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

Wood, B. E., Taylor, R., Atkins, R., & Johnston, M. (2018). Pedagogies for active citizenship: Learning through affective and cognitive domains for deeper democratic engagement. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 75, 259-267.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.07.007>

[Pre-print final document]

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.

Keywords: active citizenship; civics; social action; citizenship education; Dewey; Freire

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.

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, Lawy, & Kelly, 2009; Biesta, 2011) 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 (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 (Nelson & Kerr, 2006; Kennedy, Hahn & Lee, 2007; 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, Hahn & Lee, 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 & 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 and community-inspired responses as democratic citizens (Dewey, 1916/1963, 1947). While ‘authenticity’ has multiple meanings in a school setting, there is general agreement that in citizenship education authenticity relates to learning which has value beyond school (Parker, Valencia, & Lo, 2017) and involves “real-world problems and projects that are relevant to the learner” (Rubin et al., 2017, p. 182). While Dewey’s focus on authentic, experiential learning is central, he is at pains to emphasize that not all experiences are genuinely or equally educative – and therefore the *quality* of experiential learning is only meaningful if it lives on “fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences” (Dewey, 1947, p. 16).

In keeping with Shyman (2011) we found the paradigmatic underpinnings of Freire and Dewey’s understandings of democracy and experience to be largely comparable and complementary. Both theorists share an emancipatory commitment to liberating participants through a process of inquiry, reflection and action related to significant social and community issues. Both share a philosophy which is centred on personal and collective experiences as the starting point for reflection – Freire calls these ‘generative themes’ while Dewey refers to ‘conditions of experience’. These generate an active quest for information and new ideas

(Dewey), critique and action, or praxis (Freire). Importantly, both focus on “informed, culturally sensitive and democratically-oriented systems of education that emphasize the attainment of critical citizenship” (Shyman, 2011, p. 1036). Where these theorists differ is in emphasis. For us, a strength of Dewey’s approach is his identification of social issues and framing responses to these within the context of democratic education, whilst Freire and the critical theorists provided us with a theory of how to analyse and address systemic injustice, exclusion and social inequalities. Together, they point towards a progressive, critical framework which critiques and seeks to transform oppression in its many guises to create a better and more sustainable society, especially for those who lack power and status (Freire, 1973).

To sum up, we view ‘critical and transformative’ active citizenship education as an approach which engenders a deep commitment to a more just, equal, and inclusive society. This involves a deep and critical knowledge about authentic social issues and leads to meaningful forms of social action taken by citizens. We recognised that this type of active citizenship may be difficult to achieve, and that such projects may ignite suspicion and concern given the hierarchical and regulated nature of schools where loyalty and order is emphasised (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006). However, our aim was to set the bar high and to look for pedagogical approaches and strategies which supported high levels of student initiative, independent learning, critique of structural injustices and authentic participatory experiences (McLaughlin, 1992) in busy, assessment-focused classrooms.

3. What works for implementing active citizenship programmes in school contexts?

There is a tendency for school-based civic action programmes to provide quite minimal, content-led and apolitical experiences of citizenship education which reinforce students’ role as compliant learners and as citizens-in-waiting rather than citizens-now (Osler & Starkey, 2005). There are many reasons for this which include the contested interpretations of ‘active citizenship’ held by teachers, students and communities (Nelson & Kerr, 2006; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), didactic and traditional teaching styles (Akar, 2016), and fears of angering powerful adults (both inside and outside the school system) due to the potentially political nature of topic content and fears of politicising students (Hess, 2009; Levinson, 2012). Such concerns are underpinned by long-held debates about whether schools should be an ‘agency of social reform’ or have much tamer and compliant aspirations (Kennelly & Llewellyn, 2011; Westheimer & Kahne, 2002).

When schools do employ more active citizenship approaches, research suggests that schools can achieve ‘personally responsible’ and ‘participatory’ forms of citizenship action, but much less commonly justice-oriented or maximal forms (Kahne, & Westheimer, 2006; Levinson, 2013; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). While service learning and volunteering have been found to positively impact future civic engagement (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; McFarland & Thomas, 2006), such experiences are not usually tied to systemic or structural concerns (Levinson, 2012). Therefore, while students may experience short-term and immediate success often impacting on a small number of people (for example fund raising), such learning may encourage an avoidance of political and controversial issues and confirm young people’s sense of powerlessness – especially for those at the bottom of the civic empowerment gap – as they simply learn about how to participate to reinforce the status quo, but rarely challenge it (Levinson, 2012). These challenges need addressing if students are to experience a much more critical and transformative active citizenship curriculum.

There is a growing body of evidence that describes the type of citizenship education which results in long term commitment to civic participation. Drawing on prior literature, we identify three broad areas which have been found to contribute to current and future political engagement. First, the nature of classroom climate, its tone, and forms of pedagogical approaches can greatly enhance current and future civic engagement. An active, open, conversational, and non-biased classroom tone with levels of social trust that welcomes disagreement, deliberation, and diversity has been found to promote current and future engagement (Flanagan, Stoppa, Syvertsen, & Stout, 2010; Hess & McAvoy, 2014; Kahne & Sporte, 2008). Kahne and Sporte (2008) describe such a classroom as one in which there is a direct focus on civic and political issues and ways to act. The learning includes discussing problems in the community, open dialogue about controversial issues and opportunities for students to study issues which matter to them. The teaching of explicit concepts such as social justice and community also promotes effective understanding and lays the foundation for engagement (Davies et al., 2013). It is important to note that not all studies have found a positive correlation between civic learning and greater political participation into adulthood – and Kahne and Sporte (2008) remind us that the *quality* of civic education matters deeply.

Second, there is also evidence that engagement with local communities which support young people can enhance current and future political engagement. In the United States [US], Kahne and Sporte found that students were more likely to express higher levels of commitment to civic participation when they saw examples of neighbours dealing with

community problems, and when they felt supported and looked after in their communities. Students who expressed a sense of belonging in school also reported higher levels of commitment to civic participation (Kahne & Sporte, 2008). This highlights the importance of commitment to positive citizenship experiences for young people by whole communities as well as schools (Biesta, 2011; Biesta et al., 2009; Davies et al., 2014).

Third, providing young people with opportunities to practise more active forms of citizenship engagement is essential. Young people who actually participate in active forms of citizenship learning have found stronger patterns of future civic participation (Davies et al., 2013; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; McFarland & Thomas, 2006). For example, Kahne and Sporte (2008) found that, even when they controlled for prior civic commitments, offering students opportunities to directly act on civic and political issues in school had a significant impact on fostering students' commitments to future civic participation. McFarland and Thomas (2006) also found that more active forms of citizenship learning led to greater levels of political agency in students during school as well as greater future participation as adults in civic actions. In addition, citizenship education that focuses on topical and timely issues and employs a critical focus on public affairs is more likely to encourage active participation (Biesta et al. 2009; Davies et al., 2013; Levinson, 2012; Veugelers, 2007). It is important to be aware, however, that more academically successful students and those from wealthier families receive more civic learning opportunities (creating a Civic Opportunity Gap (Kahne & Middaugh, 2009)), and are more likely to attain higher grades in civic learning (creating a Civic Achievement Gap) (Levinson, 2012)). Classroom based programmes which specifically address these civic gaps are very important, especially in the provision of civic opportunities and knowledge (Kahne & Middaugh, 2009) and there is evidence that such opportunities enhance future engagement for all, regardless of initial disadvantage (McFarland & Thomas, 2006).

4. Context and Methodology

Our research was triggered by a curriculum and assessment initiative, introduced in 2013, which required social studies students to plan and actively participate in a social action and to reflect upon their actions in a written assignment to gain credits towards their national qualifications (New Zealand Qualifications Authority [NZQA], 2013). Prior to 2013, students examined the social action of *others* but did not undertake action themselves. Importantly, in

this new assessment, students are not graded on the *success* of their social action; instead, they are assessed on their *critical reflection* on their action – the consequences, strengths and weaknesses, and ability to identify varying perspectives towards their action. This social action process holds a great deal in common with the ‘action civics’ in the US which encourages students to *do* civics and *behave* as citizens by engaging in a cycle of research, analysing power, developing strategies, taking action and reflecting on problems they care about personally (Levinson, 2012). A key difference is that in NZ, this process is integrated with the mainstream curriculum and assessment. In 2015, around 5 000 NZ students were undertaking these participatory social action standards and there was evidence of steady annual growth (NZQA, 2016; Wood, Taylor, Atkins & Johnston, 2017).

The study took place over two years (2015-2016) and used an in-depth case study approach involving four university researchers with five partnership teachers and their students in five schools. Teachers who were skilled and motivated and represented a diverse range of high schools (in communities with mixed income, ethnicity and geographic locations – provincial and urban) were purposively selected and invited to join the study. This selection enabled us to examine patterns in practice and perceptions across this diversity (Stake, 2008). Two university researchers visited the five schools regularly over the two years, conducting classroom observations, observing social action projects, and undertaking a total of 12 focus groups interviews with students ($n=93$). Focus groups at each school consisted of between five and nine consenting students and took place during school hours at times that suited both students and their teachers. Semi-standardised questions were used in each focus group. These questions related to the experience of taking action, students’ perceptions of this and their learning. The five teachers were also interviewed before, during and after the research. In addition, a reflective practitioner model (Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, Friedman, & Pine, 2009; Schön, 1983) underpinned the school-based research. Teachers conducted research into their own practice in their own classrooms and shared these findings with each other and the university research team at regular full team meetings. All participants in the study were given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

At such meetings, the teachers and university researchers worked together to analyse collected data and critique emerging patterns within individual schools and across the five cases to confirm the validity and generalizability of the findings (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Applying the theoretical framework for critical and transformative citizenship that we had developed (outlined above) provided a way to analyse the data

according to *a priori* themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This coding process enabled a set of initial codes to be developed which were then explored across the five schools through a process of constant comparison to delineate categories and compare them (Boeiji, 2002). This process of constant comparison was also applied to the teacher data and student data to compare how the teaching was perceived by teachers and received by students. This process highlighted several collective themes across the study, as well as eliciting less expected and contrary ideas that emerged from the data (White & Marsh, 2006). For example, analysing and comparing data from both students and teachers revealed that both teachers and students viewed emotional connection with the social issue studied as pivotal to deeper engagement in social action. Comparing students' experiences with those of teachers also allowed us to probe more deeply about what had supported their deeper learning through the social action process.

These patterns and themes were shared with the participating teachers and in the second year of the project, they trialled the strategies which we had collaboratively identified as having the greatest potential for more critical and transformative social action. While prior research has highlighted the importance of a number of domains of learning in the social sciences, (e.g., Hill, 1994, identifies six), this process of research sharing and trialling drew our attention to the significance of learning for active citizenship across affective and cognitive domains. In the latter part of this paper we explore how learning through both domains was needed if social actions could potentially lead to critical and transformative social action.

5. Findings

5.1 The affective domain: Engaging emotionally with social issues

Similar to previous research in education (for example Sheppard, Katz, & Grosland, 2015; Zembylas, 2007), we had not initially focused on the significance of feelings or emotions when undertaking social action. Whilst we had considered that active engagement in social action may be motivated by emotions such as compassion, empathy or anger, we did not anticipate that these would feature significantly, nor that they would require rigorous theoretical and empirical attention (Boler, 1999; Sheppard et al., 2015; Wood & Taylor, 2017). Yet, our classroom observations and discussions with students and research partner teachers confirmed that personal impulse and desire to take action was in many ways the

“moving spring” (Dewey, 1947, p. 83) toward forms of citizenship action which were personally and socially significant.

Both teachers and students told us that an affective connection to social action was important, especially at the start of the process. Teachers explained how social action necessitated identification or affinity with a social issue if the social action was to be authentic and meaningful. Teachers were able to deepen this affective engagement through a range of strategies. A key way to encourage empathy, awareness, and the development of perspectives thinking was by encouraging their students to “step into other people’s shoes” (Janine) and by “helping young people feel connected, understand themselves, and [learn to] empathise with others” (Mel). Teachers gave examples of pedagogical strategies which enhanced this, such as encouraging students to access digital media which connected directly with people associated with the social issue studied – such as personal blogs of refugees or homeless people – and videos of the inspirational actions of others, especially those of young people, who had made a difference (for example, working against poverty). Connecting with inspiring community members who themselves were already making a difference was another way in which teachers built affective engagement.

To encourage student engagement, most teachers in our study gave students the opportunity to select their own social issue to study. Teachers believed that this encouraged student engagement and reduced the potential for indoctrination or coercion. One teacher, Mel, went as far as saying “I will never impose my choice of social issue on them – I am willing for them to fail the assessment before I’d do that”. Teachers and students described how allowing students to select social issues that they cared about or were ‘passionate about’ and had significance in their everyday experiences enhanced a greater sense of commitment and feelings of empathy. In one high school, for example, the presence of refugee students in the school and concerns about New Zealand’s low quota of refugee resettlement was a reason some students chose to focus on this issue. These students set up a school event with support from a local refugee settlement provider to enhance awareness about this issue. At this event two refugees shared their experiences and two Members of Parliament [MPs] talked about how laws for refugees were enacted in New Zealand. The students gathered signatures on an open letter advocating to increase New Zealand’s refugee quota which they sent to the Select Committee at Parliament.

Initial exposure to social issues often triggered transitory affective responses such as shock, sadness or anger, and while some students remained at a rather ‘thin’ level of affective

engagement, others formed much more profound affective commitments toward working toward change, such as Rachel (15 years):

I think the more we learned about [child poverty in NZ] the more we felt how much we take things for granted. We learned that what we have is quite a lot you know, yet, like some kids don't really have anything...

Using 'generative' themes provided a strong start for more affective engagement, which was often deepened through teacher and community input. As an example of this, two 14-year-old female students from a less affluent community chose to focus on child poverty as "many students in our school go without food and lunch". Triggered by a concern about rising food prices, they decided to try and source cheaper healthy food options for members of their school community. This led them into contact with groups in the community working on the same issues and they developed a strategy to advertise these groups' services through the school newsletter and website. While this was an example of 'participatory' citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) project, this process helped one of the students, Lily, to realise that it "wasn't finished yet" as she had witnessed other community groups struggling to address this issue long-term.

At times, however, teachers did provide a more structured experience by selecting the social issue for their students or suggesting appropriate social actions. This occurred more in our two low-income schools, especially when students had little prior experience in taking social action or low levels of confidence. This structured 'teacher-led' approach led to strong levels of knowledge of the issue and higher levels of academic success, but at times lower levels of student (affective) engagement and, at times, even resentment. For example, Ben (17 years) had been told the social issue he was required to take action on and he felt this was "kind of imposed on us" and as a result admitted, "I don't feel as emotionally charged about it". Conversely, high levels of student autonomy also resulted in frustration for some students who were confused or reported they hadn't received the guidance necessary to undertake an effective and meaningful social action. For example, Maria (18 years) reflected:

It would be really helpful if like at the start we were told that like this isn't really a [social] issue. Cause now that I look back on it like it's not an issue it's just something that's missing. So, a little bit more guidance at the start would have been better.

Maria's comments highlight a further domain of learning which was essential if students were to experience a more critical and transformative citizenship experiences – the importance of developing a deep knowledge-base about the social issues requiring action.

5.2 The cognitive domain: Critical and deliberative understandings

Feeling inspired or moved to take social action alone did not lead to critical or transformative acts of citizenship – deep knowledge was also essential. The type of knowledge which is needed in social studies is difficult to pin down (Powell, 2017). However, in keeping with Parker et al.'s (2017) 'deeper knowledge' and Young and Muller's (2010) 'powerful knowledge', we understand this knowledge to be a kind of deep learning that is adaptive, flexible, and transferable for future learning contexts. Students needed to understand the social issue they were trying to address deeply in order to be able to articulate their concerns to members of the public and defend and critique their own stance toward the issue and their actions. This included knowledge of counter-arguments and perspectives to their own. Deeper knowledge and self-critique also provided potential mitigation of accusations that students are being politically indoctrinated.

Teachers found that they needed to insist on depth of knowledge as there was a tendency for students to want to "jump to the action" (Rubin et al., 2017, p. 185) while their levels of understanding were still limited and their research shoddy or incomplete. This was particularly the case if students self-selected their social issue to take action on (as generally occurred in the five schools) but had little on-going guidance from teachers or community adults throughout the process. We found this to be the case in a small number of students ($n=14$) we interviewed who expressed frustration, discouragement, or disappointment with their social action experience. The attributed this to weak knowledge, poor selection of their social issue (such as Maria above), or lack of alignment between their issue and their action. This indicated to us that even when students selected their own issues and undertook citizenship actions, teachers still played an integral role in enhancing both knowledge and experiences.

Developing cognitive knowledge also involved deepening the level of critical thinking in regard to approaching social issues and learning. In keeping with the maximal, justice-oriented theoretical frame outlined earlier, a critical approach to exploring social issues required more than finding 'band aid' solutions. Students needed to understand and critically assess how their social action could inform long-term sustainable change and address systemic causes of injustice. This type of thinking was not natural to students, so teachers found they needed to prompt students by asking questions such as '*how can your action work towards long term change?*' Or '*who is currently excluded from the benefits of this policy?*' However, working on systemic change is neither easy nor necessarily rewarding and when two teachers in

our study encouraged students to work on the root causes of a problem, they reported less enthusiasm from some students who wanted more immediate gratification. Charlotte, a student in our study articulated this tension well when she described how she enjoyed raising money more than trying to change policy as she had a more ‘immediate’ sense that her actions made a difference when the NGO she raised money for had personally thanked her. In contrast, working to change policy “[has] more long-term effects” and impacted more people but felt less rewarding. While most of the student projects were at the ‘participatory’ rather than justice-oriented and maximal end of the spectrum, when teachers took time to explain why it was so important to work on systemic social issues and structural inequalities, students did report a higher value of this type of social action:

[Taking social action this year was] cool because you go to the *root cause* of the issue, this one we were actually talking to the people in charge... (Angie, 17 years)

It really put into perspective how we can do things to change ... it felt much more real... [...] it felt like we really can do things.... (Brendon, 18 years)

Inspiring more critical and transformative forms of social action through deepening knowledge also meant exploring the controversial and contested nature of social issues – and learning about the multifarious perspectives individuals and groups have toward these. When students had only surface-level knowledge of their social issue, we found they couldn’t articulate alternative perspectives or explain why they supported or opposed a situation or policy. In contrast, students who developed a deep, critical knowledge had rational and logical responses as well as understanding of a range of alternative perspectives on an issue (see similar findings by Westheimer & Kahne, 2002) and could critique their own actions well, such as Lisa (18 years) who reported:

I realised when we researched that there were a lot more limitations to what we were doing... with the statements that had been made and things like that. We realised that “oh, what... maybe we could have done things a lot better than we did.

Teachers played an important role in this by creating an open or “safe” (Zohar & Cohen, 2016, p. 91) atmosphere in their classrooms in order for students to feel comfortable, to express their views and deliberate in small groups and as a whole class, as well as allowing time for individual reflection and cyclical or recursive learning (Biesta, 2011; Parker et al., 2017). Indeed, with a concerted focus in the second year of our project, teachers supported students to attempt more critical and transformative forms of social action by focusing more closely on ‘high stakes problems’ (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006) by attempting to leverage policy change

to address these, by critiquing institutional injustices or working towards sustainable community impact.

5.2.1 Authentic skills for engagement in the 'real' world

A key component of the cognitive domain which emerged from our research included the range of practical skills, understandings and practices which students needed to “to accomplish real world tasks” (Levinson, 2012, p. 236) and to act as citizens in a democracy. This included a broad remit of knowledge, processes and skills required for community and civic engagement in order to: advocate for change, influence and educate others, raise awareness and communicate information and ideas, and lobby those in power. Similar to findings from citizenship education research in England (Hampden-Thompson et al., 2015), we also found that while students occasionally had picked up some civic engagement skills from extra-curricular encounters, these had rarely been the focus of school learning. In our study, an even more concerted effort was needed to nurture such skills with young people from low income communities who often had fewer prior civic experiences (Kahne & Middaugh, 2009) and frequently lower levels of political efficacy.

Students discussed how the social action assessment was “definitely more hands on, more practical than a lot of the stuff that we learn at school” as it “tests out your real-life skills as well, like interviewing and email writing, and being professional” (Kiri, 17 years). They identified how taking social action had enhanced their critical thinking and knowledge of government processes, their awareness of community activities and groups, and they had developed a range of life skills which required them to step up to another level of community engagement. This contrasted with most other learning at schools which is more “theoretical” and therefore meant it could not “test you on what would actually happen” if you tried it out (Nathan, 18 years). Getting out into the community to meet real people was also reported by most students as being highly rewarding and enjoyable as it meant “you’ve actually got that one-on-one contact with people and say if someone tells you something like their opinion of something, you can use that in your assessment as primary evidence” (Carla, 18 years). This meant that students were afforded a rare opportunity to engage in and influence life outside the classroom. In order for this type of learning to happen, teachers described how they had to ‘let go’ and be willing to ‘fail’, arguing that a focus on the learning through the process outweighed the final product.

Having opportunities to practise social action is vital for informing both political efficacy and understandings of democratic processes (Biesta, 2011; Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). We found that students who had taken social action in previous years were better equipped to take on more difficult and systemic social issues, and to advocate for change with those in positions of power. One teacher specifically developed leadership in her class by utilising students' citizenship capabilities (which they had developed through prior experiences of taking social action) to inspire and guide others by placing them as leaders in groups. A significant number of students talked about how the cyclical process of taking social action helped them to recognise that they themselves were political and knew how to influence change to government policy now and in the future. There was a sense that the process of taking social action enhanced further iterations which could potentially be stronger and result in greater impact and higher levels of political efficacy, as Miriama (17 years) reflected:

I think next time I'd work on going straight to the source, not faff around trying to get people to influence it, but actually influence it myself directly, like go into Parliament...

6. Discussion

Our research highlighted how important it was for citizenship learning experiences to engage students at the intersection of both affective and cognitive domains. For citizenship learning to be meaningful, students had a sense of *affective* engagement in the process which recognised their interests and desires. Effective social action also depended on deep *cognitive* understandings of social issues: students needed to have “good research in order to be better-informed and more effective activists on an issue” (Rubin et al., 2017, p. 185). At the intersection of these affective and cognitive domains, students had greater potential for a deep, authentic and critical experience of undertaking personal social action. As Dewey (1916/1963) reminds us, “everything depends on the *quality* of the experience which is had” (p. 16). While this quality required both affective and cognitive engagement, we also found that there was some tension between these two learning domains which was implicit in the classroom context, and which related to the processes of implementing social action, who was ‘in charge’ (teachers or students) and how engaged students were in their learning.

The first tension we identified related to the priority given to affective or cognitive engagement. It was apparent that, in order for students to have intrinsic motivation and authentic social action experiences, they needed high levels of affective engagement with a social issue. This encouraged a ‘student-led’ approach in which students selected social issues

and pathways for social action. Our study, however, found that such experiences while such approaches had high engagement, they lacked in-depth knowledge and as a result students' social actions were at times poorly conceived and lacked rationale or justification (see Rubin et al., 2017, for similar findings). On the other hand, when teachers took control over the social issue studied and the actions required in a teacher-led approach, this resulted in higher levels of cognitive knowledge but a somewhat ambivalent sense of 'care' about it, or at worst, resentment (for example, see the quote from Ben above). It appeared to us that there was at times a trade-off between engagement and knowledge which teachers were juggling. Aligned to this, we also found that the emotions which served to engage students in social action at times acted as a barrier to self-critique. A sense of compassion or outrage could be a powerful spur to engagement but, unless it was accompanied by a pedagogy that emphasised critical reflection, it could also result in a lack of willingness to develop nuanced thinking. This highlighted the enduring need for a strong knowledge base for social actions.

A second tension we noted was the balance between forms of social action which were immediately rewarding and those which addressed much deeper structural issues in society but required a much more sustained, but often less immediately rewarding, commitment. Our observations and interviews with dozens of students taking social action over the two years firmed up our impression that unless teachers took a strong and intentional focus on critical and transformative forms of social action, there was a tendency toward apolitical and 'quick-fix' forms of social action. These included activities such as community-related fundraising which gave students immediate self-gratification, but at times led to a reluctance to engage in less immediately rewarding activities such as working towards policy change, even when this was recognised as having a greater impact long-term (see Charlotte's quote above). This 'quick fix' pattern has also been confirmed in other studies (e.g. Akar, 2012; Kahne & Westheimer, 2006), where educators encouraged minimal and 'safe' options (such as service learning) that develop internal efficacy but failed to address structural issues that required systemic change. Students in our study were more likely to engage with deep-seated structural issues when they were 'required' (by the assessment focus in Year 13, their final year of schooling) to focus on policy or specifically encouraged to by teachers. Working at the level of challenging policies (such as child poverty and healthy homes) often meant they faced greater hurdles, such as lack of replies from MPs and local government representatives, and much less immediate change. In addition, teachers needed to develop skills for deeper civic engagement as such skills needed did not simply emerge or arise through some kind of

osmosis, but, an “education in ‘practical politics’, [needed to be] consciously and purposefully nurtured at every opportunity” (Davis et al., 2014, p. 191). When students had good levels of teacher guidance and support for tackling more systemic issues, then most found the experience very rewarding as they could recognise that they were working closer to the “the *root cause* of the issue”.

Some of the tensions relating to the affective and cognitive domains rest upon the extent to which the social action projects were controlled by teachers or led by students. In our study, both extremes of ‘teacher-led’ and ‘student-led’ approaches were problematic in that they could lead to lower levels of understandings, or low level of personal engagement. In our second year, we suggested teachers trial a ‘teacher-guided’ approach in order to gain both strong knowledge and engagement outcomes. This involved a delicate juggle between at times “letting go” (Zohar & Cohen, 2016, p. 94) of the decision making to enhance the learning experience and at other times intervening to promote higher order thinking, deeper cognitive engagement and enhanced civic capabilities. Without this teacher guidance through prompts, critical conversations, and resource-sharing, students’ experience was much less likely to arrive at a critical or transformative level. We viewed this interplay of teachers and students together in the active citizenship process as an intergenerational position in keeping with Hart’s ‘top’ rung of his ladder (child-initiated shared decisions with adults’), as it acknowledges the partnership such actions required in schools. Many years earlier, Dewey (1916/1963) recognised these tensions in experiential learning when he noted “it is possible of course to abuse the office and to force activity of the young into channels which express the teacher’s purpose rather than that of the pupils” (p 85). The alternative he suggests, which we also arrived at with the teachers in our study, was that a teacher-guided approach was needed throughout the process of taking social action: “The plan, in other words, is a co-operative enterprise, not a dictation” (Dewey, 1916/1963, p. 85).

Understanding the development of active citizenship as an iterative process was a further way to reduce the tensions between affective and cognitive domains. While many of the student projects did not arrive at the critical and transformative level we aimed for, we agree with Biesta’s (2011) claim that civic learning is non-linear, recursive, and cumulative in that positive and negative experiences of the past continue to influence future action and learning. More critical and transformative social action therefore was enabled through trying out “fledgling understandings in iterative cycles” (Parker et al., 2017, p. 4). When students understood that their learning from one social action was a great source of help for another, they had

opportunity to deepen their approaches in another round of social action – as Lily comments – the first round helped her to understand her social action wasn't 'finished yet' and needed additional and deeper forms of action. This confirms Dewey's (1947) argument that experiential learning is an interaction between both external factors and internal responses (objective and subjective) and necessitates an ongoing commitment to growth.

Finally, the theoretical framework we posed in this paper offers a further way to balance some of the tensions inherent in taking social action in mainstream curriculum programmes. Dewey provided deep insights into the importance of experiential and authentic learning for students to develop the skills of democratic engagement. Using the everyday as a site for learning also enhances an understanding of citizenship as a "set of activities in the world" (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2016, p. 280), rather than an abstract idea or a 'thing' (Biesta et al., 2009). In addition, Freire's theories drew attention to structural and systemic oppression. A significant part of the social action experience therefore requires the development of 'conscientization' within students. Freire (1973) is very clear here that that development of knowledge and critical thinking is not through "verbalistic lessons" (p. 57) by the teacher, but instead, arises through a process of problem-posing that is concerned about *reality* and is established through communication between teachers and students. This leads to "the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality" (p. 62) which is founded upon generative themes experienced by young people themselves in their everyday worlds. Balancing the experiential and affective along with the cognitive domains of learning was key to growing a sense of conscientization within students and quickening in them a desire to act. The challenge for educators therefore is to select the kind of present experiences that "arouses in the learner an active quest for information and production of new ideas" (Dewey, 1947, p. 113) and addresses deeper issues of systemic injustice and inequality in society.

7. Conclusion

Our identification of pedagogies for active citizenship for school-based active citizenship programmes has wider implications beyond our New Zealand-based study. At the heart of our study was a desire to identify and explore the conditions and approaches which could support the formation and ongoing transformation of students' political subjectivities within a democracy. Our research drew attention to the highly tuned, specific skill set required by

teachers to support the ongoing development the active citizen through pedagogies which supported affective engagement and the development of cognitive knowledge and skills for citizenship engagement. This required a delicate balance of intervention and surrendering authority; providing guidance to pull projects back from uncritical action and arduous ‘schoolified’ reflection; and the gentle navigation of student spontaneity and emotional engagement alongside critique and a focus on long-term and structural change. In keeping with Davies et al. (2014), we found that

Citizenship education has a body of substantive knowledge (albeit drawing from a range of disciplines) and a set of skills (including the ability to collate evidence, identify channels of influence, advance an argument, participate in debate and speak in public....) [and as such] requires specialist delivery. (p. 191)

Teachers in our study needed a highly developed skill set to encourage students’ emotional engagement (in order to counter tokenistic, technocratic, and minimal social action for credit-harvesting), yet to avoid emotional coercion and at the same time to promote in-depth understandings of social issues in a way that interrogated the very ‘roots’ of the problem and encourage sustainable social actions. A commitment to critical transformative forms of social action which we have theorised through Dewey and Freire is essential to prevent the drift in active citizenship programmes toward muted and apolitical versions of social action.

In short, there is a need for teachers to become ‘critical design experts’ (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2016) in the teaching of active citizenship education curricula (Willemse, ten Dam, Geijssels, van Wessum, & Volman 2015). While there often is an assumption that ‘anyone can teach social studies’, our study confirms the need for highly skilled specialist teachers (Davies et al., 2014; Levinson, 2012; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2016) who are “agile and creative in mastering a wide variety of topics and issues as well as figuring out curricular connections, often on the fly” (Levinson, 2012, p. 256). Such teachers hold the pedagogical content knowledge which can enable both freedom of thought as well as promote criticality about some of the world’s most complex issues. Whilst this may be a lofty goal, if the aim of critical-democratic citizenship education is “to educate young people to have a critical, enquiring attitude, to have the courage and the creativity to tread new paths, to question all knowledge—including their own knowledge” (Veugelers, 2007, p. 117), then paying more attention to the pedagogical strategies which support such aims is essential.

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