

Education Through Citizenship at School: Do School Activities Have a Lasting Impact on Youth Political Engagement?

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Over the past two decades, various policy initiatives have been proposed to solve the perceived problem of youth disengagement from politics. This article examines the impact of one such policy initiative—namely the introduction of activities that seek to teach ‘education *through* citizenship’ at school. In short, ‘education *through* citizenship’ involves formal and informal learning opportunities that enable students to acquire civic skills and knowledge through hands-on experiences. School councils, debate teams and/or mock elections are some of the most common ‘education through citizenship’ activities in schools in England, and drawing on data from the *Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study* this article shows that such activities can indeed have an effect, not just in the short-term (as previous studies in England have shown), but also in the medium-term (by encouraging political engagement once the students have left the confines of the school). This article thus argues that school activities can have a lasting and independent impact on youth political engagement and provides support for the continuation of education *through* citizenship, as well as *about* citizenship.

Keywords: School councils, Voting, Civic engagement, Political participation, Youth, Education through citizenship

1. Introduction

Youth civic engagement has been the subject of much comment, concern and contestation over the past two decades, both in the UK and internationally. In England, much of this debate has focused on the declining rates of youth participation in activities such as voting and volunteering. Rates of civic engagement are declining across all age groups, but the downward trend appears to be particularly steep

among young people who are less likely than previous generations to vote, become a member of a political party or a trade union and/or to volunteer (Attwood *et al.*, 2003, p. 81; Whiteley, 2011; Henn and Foard, 2014, p. 361). Concern about these trends has prompted the introduction of a wide range of policy initiatives over the past 15 years (see HM Government, 2010), many of them targeted at young people in schools. These school-based initiatives have not only aimed to increase opportunities for learning about civic engagement through the formal curriculum (i.e. with the introduction of a new *Citizenship* subject), but also to increase opportunities for students to learn about citizenship through experiential, extra-curricular and informal learning activities. These types of activities involve, for example, participating in student councils or conducting community-based action projects with classmates.

The impetus to increase initiatives such as these is underpinned by the belief that young people acquire civic attitudes and behaviours not just from being educated about citizenship through the formal curriculum, but also by putting citizenship into practice (i.e. education *through* citizenship; Kerr, 1999). Furthermore, it is also hoped that these experiential learning activities will have a lasting impact on youth attitudes and behaviours and that they will encourage young people to participate in civic life after they have left school and made the transition to adulthood and 'full' citizenship. Yet while there is plenty of evidence to confirm that these types of activities boost civic engagement in the short-term, the evidence that these benefits endure into adulthood is more limited. This article therefore seeks to test these assumptions on a cohort of young people from England, using panel data from the *Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study* (CELS) and focusing in particular on the potential benefits of school-based activities that may enhance students' skills in the political arena (such as student councils and debating clubs). Through path analysis of these data we show that activities such as these can have a positive effect on two types of youth civic engagement (namely electoral and expressive political participation) even after students have left the confines of the school and have moved into early adulthood.

2. Education for civic engagement in England: motives and mechanisms

Amidst concerns about the decline in civic engagement in Britain, schools were tasked with introducing a wide range of opportunities for students to learn about citizenship. The largest, and perhaps most ambitious, initiative was the introduction of *Citizenship* as a statutory subject in the National Curriculum for compulsory second-level education from 2002 onwards (on the politics behind this decision, see Kisby, 2012; Tonge *et al.*, 2012; Whiteley, 2014).

This new subject was distinct from ‘traditional’ subject areas in that it was not expected that citizenship learning would be delivered simply through a rigid taught curriculum and/or discrete classes in the timetable; in fact, schools were given a great deal of latitude to decide how and when to teach their students about citizenship (see [Keating and Kerr, 2013](#)). In addition, great store was placed on the idea that students should be able to put their citizenship learning *into* practice and to learn *from* practice. The prevailing policy view was summed up by the Lord Chancellor of the day, who emphasised that ‘since we learn by doing, the practical experience of citizenship is at least as important as formal education’ (Lord Chancellor quoted in [QCA, 1998](#), p. 61).

In keeping with this belief, the subsequent curriculum framework envisaged that schools would provide opportunities for citizenship learning in three overlapping contexts: the taught/formal curriculum; the school culture and ethos; and the wider community ([Keating and Kerr, 2013](#)). To this end, in addition to the new *Citizenship* curriculum schools were also encouraged to develop projects that involved students working in and with their communities and to institute structures that would facilitate student participation and ‘pupil voice’ in school governance and decision making ([QCA, 1998](#)). When it came to implementing these suggestions, schools faced a number of obstacles (institutional, cultural and practical; [Keating et al., 2009](#)). Yet despite these challenges, the CELS surveys of school leaders indicated that between 2002 and 2010 there was a notable increase in the number and range of opportunities being offered by schools for students to learn about citizenship through extra-curricular activities and community activities. Likewise, more and more schools included students in decision-making processes, and by 2008 almost all schools had introduced a school council for their students, and the vast majority had some means of consulting their students about the school rules and procedures (*ibid.* p. 70, p. 68).

2.1 *The civic purpose of participation during adolescence*

These initiatives were underpinned by the belief that education *about* citizenship (i.e. knowledge and understanding of political institutions and processes) should be complemented with education *through* citizenship; that is, ‘learning by doing, through active, participative experiences in the school or local community and beyond’ ([Kerr, 1999](#), p. 12). Various justifications for this approach have been provided. From a normative perspective, for example, one could argue that even before they reach the age of majority, children and young people are still citizens and therefore it is only right that schools should be providing students with opportunities to exercise their rights and responsibilities and to participate in their school and wider communities ([Whitty and Wisby, 2007](#), p. 21). In addition to normative claims such as this, however, empirical studies have suggested that participation during

adolescence is associated with a number of benefits, both for the individual and for the wider society (see [Schmidt *et al.*, 2007](#)). For example, and of particular relevance for this context, [Niemi and Junn's \(2005\)](#) classic study of civic education found that participation in student government and mock elections is associated with higher levels of political knowledge and (albeit to a lesser extent) political trust. Likewise, [Quintelier \(2008\)](#) found that young people in Belgium who were members of voluntary organisations were more like to engage in a wide range of political activities, such as protesting, contacting politicians and signing petitions. And in a comparative analysis of five European countries (including England), [Hoskins *et al.* \(2012\)](#) found that students who take part in participatory learning activities (such as school councils, volunteering in the community or charitable fund-raising) are more likely to express positive participatory attitudes (such as intentions to vote and engage in civic and political activities in the future).

These studies capture the short-term benefits of education *through* citizenship, but it has also been suggested that the effects can last into adulthood ([Verba *et al.*, 1995](#); [McFarland and Thomas, 2006](#), p. 404). There appear to be two key hypotheses as to why these effects may be enduring—one skills-based and one rooted in theories of socialisation. In terms of the former, the central premise is that experiential learning activities expose children and young people to information and skills that continue to stimulate and/or buttress civic and political engagement during adulthood ([Niemi and Junn, 2005](#), p. 96; [Zukin *et al.*, 2006](#), pp. 142–144). [Quintelier \(2008, p. 357\)](#), for instance, hypothesises that youth participation in extra-curricular activities and voluntary associations can provide politically relevant skills such as: ‘deliberation, compromise, speaking in public, expressing an opinion, learning to work in groups, and assimilating other people’s opinions’. What is more, these types of activities provide young people not only with the skills that they need for future participation, but also with an heightened awareness that helps them to identify the problem(s) that are in their communities, and the sense of political efficacy with which to go and tackle these problem(s) (*ibid*; [McFarland and Thomas, 2006](#), p. 404).

However, as [Niemi and Junn \(2005, p. 53\)](#) point out, exposure to information and skills does not guarantee that these gains will be absorbed or retained. To explain why these skills might be retained, theories of political socialisation point to the fact that adolescence is a formative period in youth civic and political identity-formation. The habits and identities that are forged during this period thus persist into adulthood where they continue to shape attitudes and behaviours ([Delli Carpini, 1989](#); [Kahne *et al.*, 2013](#), p. 421). In the course of participating in experiential activities, the theory goes, young people are exposed to norms of ‘good’ citizenship that they subsequently internalise, replicate and perpetuate. If these dispositions also become habit at this point, this bodes well for future participation, or at least for certain types of political engagement; citizens who participate in

elections are consistently more likely to continue to do so in the future and thus habit-formation has also proved to be a recurring thesis in the voting behaviour literature (Plutzer, 2002, p. 42). [As Zukin *et al.* (2006, p. 11) point out, however, it should not be assumed that this socialisation process will automatically result in exact replication of civic values and attitudes; intergenerational change can and does take place because of critical junctures (such as economic crises) and/or longer term shifts (such as the technological advancements)].

2.2 Limits of the current research

Regardless of the underlying reason, however, these various theories rest on the assumption that participation begets further participation. The next question to ask, then, is what evidence is there to support these theories. In this regard, the evidence base is still somewhat limited. For one, much of the existing research focuses on the impact of community service programmes, which tend to focus on how the individual can make a difference in their local community, rather than on learning about the larger social/political structures and how change can be effected through these institutions (see Kahne *et al.*, 2013). In addition, because of the challenges and costs of longitudinal data collection among this highly mobile group, many of the studies discussed above have had to rely on cross-sectional data (cf. Niemi and Junn, 2005; Quintelier, 2008; Hoskins *et al.*, 2012). This presents two problems. First, this means that many of these studies have been unable to control for prior attitudes towards or experiences of participation, and hence are unable to address questions about self-selection and the direction of causality; in other words, cross-sectional studies cannot confirm if youth civic engagement is the direct result of their participatory learning experiences, or simply because the individuals in question are *already* predisposed to taking part (Quintelier, 2008, p. 357).

Second, few studies have been able to examine whether students' positive attitudes persist over time and translate into actual behaviour during adulthood. Instead, many of the studies described above can only shed light on the potential short-term benefits of participation and draw suppositions about students' positive dispositions towards participation at some future date. Two notable exceptions to this are McFarland and Thomas' (2006) and Hart *et al.*'s (2007) analyses. Both of these studies found that among students in the USA, participation during adolescence is indeed associated with increased likelihood of civic engagement, and that the effects can be seen up to eight years after the participants had left school (see also Thomas and McFarland, 2010). More recently, Quintelier (2015) has conducted similar longitudinal research in Belgium, but in terms of school influences, this analysis only examines the role of political discussion, open class climate and group projects.

This article therefore seeks to build on this work in several ways. First, it extends the range of cases by adding analysis from the England context, and by looking at the medium-term rather than the short-term effects of participatory experiences during adolescence. Second, it uses a range of statistical models with lagged measures to examine how youth civic engagement might be influenced by participatory experiences at different points in adolescence. Third, it focuses explicitly on the impact of school-based initiatives to develop politically-relevant skills through hands-on experiences, rather than on the role of community service, voluntary associations or school climate. The school-based activities that are of interest here are school councils, mock elections and debating clubs. The latter help students to acquire deliberative skills (Quintelier, 2008), while school councils and mock elections provide opportunities for hands-on experience of voting and democratic decision making (at least in theory) (Torney-Purta *et al.*, 2002). We elected to focus on these activities in particular primarily because of the interest in these activities in policy circles in England (Whitty and Wisby, 2007; Keating and Kerr, 2013), but also because previous research has suggested that in the US context, these activities can have a positive and lasting effect on youth civic engagement (McFarland and Thomas, 2006).

3. Data and methods

To examine the impact of these types of school activities, we draw on data from the CELS, which (among other things) collected survey data from a complete cohort of young people from a nationally-representative¹ sample of maintained schools in England. To date, the cohort has been surveyed five times, and this article draws on three of these data points:

- Wave 1, which was administered in schools when the cohort was at the start of their compulsory secondary education and 11–12 years of age (i.e. Year 7)
- Wave 3, which was undertaken when the participants were age 15–16 and reaching the end of compulsory secondary education (i.e. Year 11) and
- Wave 5 which was conducted in 2011, when the cohort were aged 19–20 and had completed their secondary education (referred to as ‘Year 15’ from hereon in, for consistency).

¹The characteristics of the sample of participating schools was checked against the characteristics of maintained schools nationally and were found to be representative in terms of region, GCSE attainment, percentage of students eligible for free school meals and the percentage of students of English as an additional language. There was no within-school sample as whole year groups took part and so no requirement to check the representativeness of students within schools.

Wave 5 was a follow-up study that was not part of the original project design and that was conducted once the participants had left the site in which the data were usually collected (i.e. their school). These factors contributed to the high attrition that the study experienced over time (in Wave 1, $N = 18,583$; in Wave 5, $N = 1232$). To test for attrition effects, we followed [Eckstein et al. \(2012\)](#) and compared respondents who only participated in the first wave with those who participated in all three waves ($N = 746$). Notable attrition effects were found in our measures of parental education and cultural capital (i.e. number of books at home), with the respondents participating in Waves 3 and 5 reporting significantly higher numbers of books and higher levels of parental education than respondents who only took part in the Wave 1 sample. To account for this skewed attrition, after Wave 1 the data from each subsequent round were weighted to match the characteristics of the larger Wave 1 sample in terms of gender, ethnicity and number of books in the home. Each of these variables were also included in the subsequent statistical analysis as controls (see below). According to [Paterson \(2013, p. 29\)](#), this helps to counterbalance any remaining skew that the weights are unable to address. We thus proceed with an analytic sample constituting those who participated in Waves 1, 3 and 5 ($N = 746$).

In addition to unit non-response (i.e. attrition) there is also an issue of item non-response on the variables included in the model. To account for this issue, we imputed these missing data using the Bayes estimation technique in Mplus (see [Muthen and Muthen, 2009](#)). This procedure creates 10 datasets with imputed values and averages the parameter estimates out over a set with a corresponding number of analyses.

3.1 Variables of interest

As noted above, our aim here is to examine the civic outcomes of participatory learning experiences such as school councils, mock elections and debating clubs. To that end, for this analysis we created a summary variable to capture individual students' participation in these activities. This variable (which we call *school-based political activities* from hereon in) reflects the sum of four items and is based on items that asked respondents if they had participated in debating clubs, student councils, elections for council members and/or mock elections in the last year. This summary variable has a minimum of 0 (not participated in any clubs or events) and a maximum of 4 (participated in all clubs and events). A separate variable was created for Years 7 (Wave 1) and 11 (Wave 3) to give us a measure of participation at each time point and to allow us to compare their different effects over time.

As noted above, the assumption that we seek to examine in this article is that these activities have an impact on civic engagement after the students have left

school and reached the age of ‘full’ political citizenship. However, defining and measuring civic engagement is challenging as there is no consensus on what this should entail. In this article we focus on the ‘political’ dimensions of civic engagement, which are equally contested (see [Ekman and Amna, 2012](#)). For some, political participation is conceptualised purely in terms of direct engagement with electoral politics and/or political institutions (e.g. voting in elections and membership of a political party). For others, however, measures of political engagement must also include ‘non-institutional’ or ‘expressive’ forms of participation (e.g. taking part in demonstrations, petitions, occupations and online activities). There is a long-standing and on-going debate about whether electoral and expressive activities should be considered distinct concepts, but [Zukin *et al.* \(2006, pp. 57–58\)](#), [Campbell \(2009, p. 778\)](#) and [Albacete \(2014\)](#) have shown that the distinction remains useful, both methodologically and theoretically.

In light of this, we developed two separate outcome measures for inclusion in our analysis—one to reflect electoral participation and one to reflect what we will call ‘expressive’ political activities from hereon in (following [Campbell, 2009](#)). Due to the constraints of our survey instrument, our first outcome measure focuses exclusively on voting as an expression of electoral participation. And in line with this, this measure is based on a single item, namely respondents’ reports of participating in the 2010 general election [0 = No; 1 = Yes]. In contrast, our second outcome encapsulates a wide range of expressive activities, such as taking part in demonstrations, boycotting products, contacting politicians and using social media for political purposes. To operationalise this outcome, a simple summative scale of the 10 activities was constructed; in this sample, this measure has a minimum of zero (not participated in any activity) and a maximum of eight (participated in all but two activities) (see Appendix A for the wording of these items).

We present the descriptive statistics of the two outcome variables in [Table 1](#), along with the statistics for our predictor variable at the two different time points of interest (Years 7 and 11).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of the outcome and predictor variables

Restricted sample (N = 746)	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Electoral activities (reported voting in Year 15)	0	1	0.68	
Expressive activities (Year 15)	0	8	1.55	1.57
School-based activities (Year 11)	0	4	0.79	0.83
School-based activities (Year 7)	0	4	1.11	0.85

Source: CELS Waves 1, 3 and 5.

With regard to the Year 15 outcomes, we can see that at age 19/20, 68 per cent of respondents reported having voted in the 2010 elections and that, on average, they engaged in 1.5 different ‘expressive’ political activities. As one might expect, the latter is skewed towards the minimum end reflecting the fact that most people engage in a very limited number of political activities beyond voting. A similar skew appears on the predictor variable: most respondents report having participated in zero, one or two school-based activities. Furthermore, we can see that the reported level of participation in such activities is lower in Year 11 than in Year 7.

In addition to these key variables, we also included a number of control variables in the models. In terms of background variables, the relevant controls are gender, ethnicity, and social class; each of these has been found to impact on political participation by previous research (e.g. Beck and Jennings, 1982; Uhlaner *et al.*, 1989; Verba *et al.*, 1995; Achen, 2002; Hooghe and Stolle, 2004). Following McLeod *et al.* (2010), we operationalise social class through three measures: parental education; respondents’ own educational aspirations; and books in the home. To account for school-based conditions, we also controlled for both open classroom climate (as measured with a scale comprising six items about student perceptions of an open climate of classroom discussion; Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.811$) and student perceptions of the amount of citizenship education received; previous research has indicated that these variables are also associated with increased civic and political engagement (e.g. Torney-Purta, 2002; Zukin *et al.*, 2006; Campbell, 2008; Whiteley, 2014). All of these control variables are based on Year 11 responses.

Finally, we also added ‘prior’ measurements of the two participation outcomes to the models. These prior measures were created from student responses in Wave 1 (Year 7) data about their intentions to participate in electoral and/or expressive politics in the future (see Appendix A). This strategy allows us to investigate the degree of autocorrelation in the outcomes of interest, an important step in ensuring that the effect of school activities on the engagement outcomes is genuine and does not reflect a prior propensity of individuals to get involved in political activities. Controlling for these initial levels of engagement thus enables us to assess to what extent school-based activities have contributed to *changes* in engagement from the moment when the participants started secondary school (cf. Finkel, 1995; Kahne *et al.*, 2013).

3.2. Methods

Having established the variables of interest, we then used path analysis to examine the links between these school-based activities in Years 7 and 11 and reported behaviour in Year 15 (when the participants in question were aged 19–20). Path analysis is an advanced form of regression analysis that allows for the exploration

of causal trajectories between two or more (intermediate) variables. This method was used here to estimate two *lagged panel* models, which allowed us to examine the impact of our predictors (participation in school activities at different time points during adolescence) on our outcomes of interest while also controlling for prior dispositions to participate.

These two models included a *cross-lagged* design and what we describe as a *zigzag* design (respectively, called Model 1 and Model 2; see Figure 1). While the former assesses the impact of Year 7 school-based activities, Model 2 does so for Year 11 school-based activities. In the zigzag model (Model 2), Year 11 school-based activities are positioned as an intermediate variable between prior measures of the outcome variables and the outcomes themselves. Path analysis enables an assessment of such models through its ability to explore causal sequences involving more than two variables. To our knowledge previous studies using lagged designs to examine this question have only used the cross-lagged variety (see Figure 1) (e.g. de Jonge *et al.*, 2001; Kahne *et al.*, 2013). The limitation of this variety is that it would only enable us to assess the effects of Year 7 school-based activities on our outcomes of interest. In view of the aforementioned studies arguing that adolescence is a key formative period for political engagement, it may well be that more recent participation in such activities (Year 11 at ages 15–16) leaves a stronger impression on adult political participation. The zigzag design thus aims to help us to establish this.

Along the way, we also examined links between prior intentions to participate (measured in Year 7) and school-based political activities in subsequent years (i.e. in Year 11). This enabled us to assess the possibility of reverse causation between school-based activities and our engagement outcomes. At the same time, we also explored the link between prior and later measures of school-based activities, in this case, to assess continuity in the predictor of interest. Our

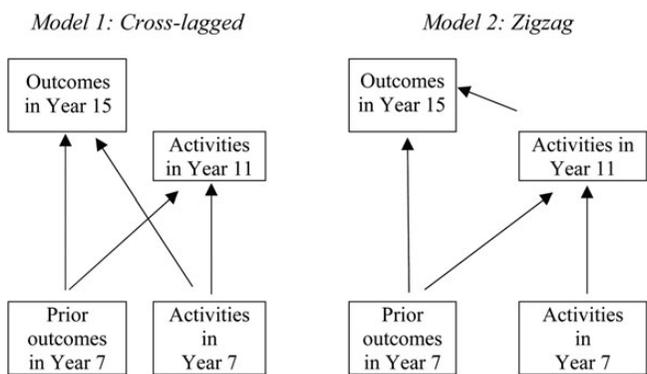


Figure 1 Lagged panel models

models thus also enable an assessment of reciprocal relationships between the independent and dependent variables as well as autocorrelation in the independent variable. In addition, as noted above, our analysis also includes controls for gender, parental education, respondents' own educational aspirations, books at home, classroom climate and reported citizenship education. Each of these variables has regularly been shown to be related to youth political engagement.

Finally, in this path analysis, each model examines the two outcomes simultaneously. Logistic regression was used for voting (since this outcome is binary), while linear regression was applied for expressive political participation.² The results of this analysis are discussed in the next section.

4. Results

Table 2 shows the results of the path analyses for the two outcomes of interest measured in Year 15. As noted above, Model 1 focuses on the impact of participation in school-based political activities during Year 7, while Model 2 focuses on the impact of participation in Year 11. Using this lagged approach, we found that there is no direct relationship between school-based political activities in Year 7 and our outcomes of interest (see Model 1), which suggests that activities at this young age (11–12) are not leaving a lasting impression on electoral or expressive types of engagement. However, this does not necessarily mean that school-based activities in Year 7 are redundant; as we shall see in the discussion below, the benefits of activities at this juncture may instead be cumulative and indirect.

In contrast, participation in Year 11 has clear and strong effects on both of our outcomes of interest (see the *t* ratios in Model 2). In other words, the young adults in this cohort are more likely to have participated in electoral and/or expressive activities if they had taken part in school-based political activities in the final year of lower secondary education. This is a noteworthy finding as it suggests that school-organised political activities at age 15–16 can continue to influence political behaviour after the students in question have reached the age of majority. Moreover, the fact that participation in school-based activities has positive effects on both outcomes (its effect on expressive forms of participation is even slightly stronger than on voting) indicates that it can foster a wide range of political activities all at once.

It is also worth noting that the effects of participation in Year 11 school-based activities were observed even after taking respondents' prior dispositions to participate into account. This provides further weight to the claim that the impact of such

²We preferred OLS regression over ordered logistic regression for expressive political participation because the coefficients of OLS regression are easier to interpret in terms of effect sizes. In any case, we carried out both types of analysis and found the results to be practically identical in terms of the signs and significance levels of the estimates.

Table 2 Determinants of political participation

Predictors	Model 1				Model 2			
	Electoral participation		Expressive participation		Electoral participation		Expressive participation	
	Estimate	T ratio	Estimate	T ratio	Estimate	T ratio	Estimate	T ratio
Year 7 school-based political activities	0.167	0.97	-0.140	-1.80				
Year 11 school-based political activities					0.286*	2.35	0.261**	3.10
Year 7 electoral participation intentions	0.402***	3.63			0.404***	3.57		
Year 7 expressive participation intentions			0.168	0.82			0.185	0.97
Open climate of classroom discussion	-0.153	-0.66	-0.185	-1.15	-0.209	-0.93	-0.250	-1.61
Gender (1 boy; 2 girl)	-0.248	-1.56	-0.068	-0.46	-0.283	-1.76	-0.037	-0.26
Books at home	0.370***	4.50	0.199***	4.34	0.359***	4.50	0.165***	3.72
Ethnic identity ('White British' ref cat)								
Asian	0.748*	2.08	-0.083	-0.33	0.739*	2.02	-0.183	-0.73
Black	0.119	0.16	-0.406	-0.82	0.052	0.07	-0.416	-0.86
Chinese	0.557	0.43	-0.842	-1.61	0.409	0.34	-0.725	-1.65
Mixed	2.200	1.61	-0.680	-1.43	2.023	1.51	-0.776	-1.67
White European	-1.315	-1.15	1.251*	2.24	-1.191	-1.08	1.234*	2.45
Other	0.668	0.31	1.229	1.24	0.536	0.25	1.180	1.28
Mother's education ('left at 16' ref cat)								
Left after college or sixth form	-0.047	-0.19	0.089	0.67	-0.044	-0.19	0.095	0.73
Studied at university	0.012	0.04	0.339	1.74	-0.021	-0.08	0.299	1.55
Father's education ('left at 16' ref cat)								
Left after college or sixth form	0.206	0.78	0.196	1.43	0.198	0.74	0.205	1.54
Studied at university	1.144***	3.66	0.109	0.59	1.115**	3.41	0.159	0.85
Expected further education (,'end Y 11' ref cat)								
Until 17	-0.247	-0.37	-0.233	-0.43	-0.190	-0.29	-0.231	-0.76

Continued

Table 2 Continued

Predictors	Model 1				Model 2			
	Electoral participation		Expressive participation		Electoral participation		Expressive participation	
	Estimate	T ratio	Estimate	T ratio	Estimate	T ratio	Estimate	T ratio
Until 18	0.286	1.04	0.258	1.47	0.256	0.92	0.274	1.48
Until early 20s	0.334	1.19	0.736***	3.91	0.259	0.94	0.701***	3.83
Reported citizenship education ('a lot' ref cat)								
A little	0.010	0.05	0.061	0.49	0.042	0.22	0.069	0.58
Not at all	-1.06*	-2.08	-0.276	-1.10	-1.021*	-2.11	-0.277	-1.14
R ²	0.260		0.166		0.265		0.178	

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

activities is genuine and is not merely reflecting a selection effect. Looking at these relationships in greater detail, we see that students' prior dispositions (i.e. their intentions to vote in Year 7 (age 11/12)) has a positive effect on their electoral participation, while similarly early intentions towards *expressive* activities have no effect on their reported expressive participation in Year 15 (age 19/20). This suggests that a disposition to engage in expressive forms of participation may be more fluid during adolescence, and thus more open to influence by initiatives that seek to boost political engagement.

Interestingly, when we compare the *t*-ratios in Model 2 we can see that participation in school-based activities is also a more potent driver of political participation than formal citizenship education. The latter only has a (small) positive effect on voting and it does not appear to influence expressive participation. This suggests that education *through* citizenship can be more effective in promoting expressive participation later in life than education *about* citizenship. Similar findings emerged from longitudinal studies in the USA (see Hart *et al.*, 2007).

Of the remaining control variables, only the ones capturing social background and educational aspirations appear to be significant drivers of political participation, confirming the findings of earlier research (Beck and Jennings, 1982; Verba *et al.*, 1995; Achen, 2002).

4.1 Could reverse causation explain these results?

To account for the possibility of reverse causation, we also examined whether prior intentions influenced participation in school-based activities. If so, this would suggest that participants in these activities were self-selecting, and that the potential learning and socialisation effects of these activities would be limited. In light of this, we assessed the full version of the model showing the strongest effects of school-based activities on engagement outcomes, which happens to be Model 2 (i.e. the zigzag model) (see Figure 2).

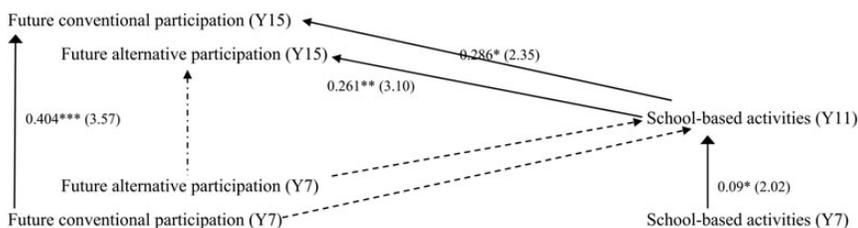


Figure 2 The impact of participation in school-based activities on political participation (Model 2). * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. *T*ratios are given in parentheses. The interrupted lines denote non-significant relationships. Each of the relationships shown in Figure 2 also include controls for gender, ethnicity, social class and other control variables. To obtain the effects of these control variables, please contact the authors, who can provide the full model(s) upon request.

As Figure 2 illustrates, we can see there is no evidence of reverse causation whatsoever: in other words, neither of the two Year 7 prior intentions variables show a significant link with Year 11 school-based political activities. This is a noteworthy finding as the time lag between Year 11 school-based activities and Year 15 engagement outcomes is as large as the gap between Year 7 prior engagement and Year 11 school-based activities (i.e. four years in both cases). Finding then, as we do, that school activities have an effect on engagement rather than the other way around indicates that school activities are quite independent of prior engagement.

What Figure 2 does show is that there is a relationship between Year 7 and Year 11 school-based participation, which suggests that students who participated in these activities in Year 7 are more likely to participate again in Year 11. This, in turn, raises the possibility that in the early years of adolescence, the impact of these activities may be cumulative rather than direct. That is, it may be that the benefit of Year 7 activities is not their direct and residual effects on later outcomes (in Year 15), but rather that they increase the likelihood that students will take part at a point when such activities *will* have a lasting impact (i.e. Year 11). This pattern also suggests that it may be beneficial to provide repeated engagement in these activities, rather than assume a one-off intervention will have lasting benefits.

Finally, these results also raise a key question: why are school-based activities less responsive to prior engagement than engagement is to school-based activities? One reason could be that these activities are organised by the school, and participation in such activities could thus be compulsory or reflect strong school- or peer- pressure to take part, rather than result from a prior individual propensity to participate. If this reason applies then we would expect these activities to vary quite significantly *between* schools since some schools will organise more of these activities than others. An analysis of the partition of the variance of Year 11 school-based activities (using the null model of a multilevel analysis) showed that 10% of this variance in participation levels is *between* schools and 90% is between individuals *within* schools. Notwithstanding this high proportion of variance at the individual level, a proportion of 10% at the second level (in our case that of schools) represents a relatively large effect size, according to Duncan and Raudenbusch's (1999) rule of thumb. This provides some support for the idea that school-based activities are at least partly a collective enterprise. But whatever the reason for the insensitivity of school-based activities to prior participatory intentions, their relatively exogenous character suggests that they can play an important role in encouraging young people to become politically engaged after they leave school and have become young adults.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In sum, using path analysis of longitudinal data from CELS, we found that school-based political activities can indeed have a positive and independent effect on

electoral and expressive political engagement among young people in England. These effects were apparent even after the participants had left school and had become young adults, and above and beyond the effects of prior dispositions or other known predictors (such as socio-economic status) that we included in the models as controls.

What we did not expect was that these positive effects were only clearly apparent for activities undertaken during Year 11, while participation in the same activities during Year 7 did not have a lasting direct effect on young adult's political participation. One reason for this could be that young people are more receptive to this education *through* citizenship model of learning at this point in their mid-teens (i.e. in Year 11), and/or more confident to be able to carry out tasks that typically involve public speaking and decision-making. Alternatively, it could be that Year 7 school-based activities have an indirect effect, in that they increase the likelihood of participation at a time when the direct benefits can be accrued (i.e. in mid-adolescence). This argument is strengthened by the results in Figure 2, which show that there is a positive and direct relationship between participation in Year 7 and participation in Year 11. It should not therefore be assumed that schools need only provide education *through* citizenship in Year 11. Instead, we should infer from this that such activities are particularly important at this juncture, but that such activities should be provided consistently to maximise take-up and (ultimately) political engagement.

The import of providing these types of activities is further affirmed when we consider the size of the effects, which are not insubstantial. We calculated that as our school-based activities measure moves from minimum (0) to maximum (4), so the predicted probability of voting rises by 14.9 per cent.³ Likewise, expressive political participation increases by 13.1 per cent on a scale from 0 to 8 ($4 \times 0.261 = 1.044$; $1.044/8 = 0.1305$).

A final point to note is that we could not find evidence for reverse causation—that is, of prior levels of engagement impacting on participation in school-based activities. The latter can thus be understood as a fairly external condition having an independent effect on political engagement. This is an encouraging finding from the point of view of making effective interventions to foster political engagement, as it suggests that schools can instigate these activities without having to be concerned that only young people who are already predisposed to participate will take part in (or benefit from) these activities. In light of this, schools should continue to be encouraged to give students opportunities to practice citizenship through student councils and similar activities, so that students can experience education *through* citizenship as well as education *about* citizenship.

³We calculated these probabilities using the method described in Osborne (2012, p. 6, p. 7).

From an academic perspective, then, our results reaffirm the findings of longitudinal studies from the USA and Belgium (McFarland and Thomas, 2006; Hart *et al.*, 2007; Quintelier, 2013) and extend the cross-sectional studies from the USA and the UK (Niemi and Junn, 2005; Zukin *et al.*, 2006; Hoskins *et al.*, 2012). Yet from a policy or practitioner perspective, these school-based political activities should not be interpreted as a panacea to the ‘problem’ of engaging young people in politics. For one, while adolescence is formative, we must remember that political attitudes are not static after this point. Instead, they continue to be malleable after young people have left school and particularly as they make the transition into and through early adulthood. As their attitudes are still being formed, this also means that attitudes are potentially more vulnerable to shocks (such as political scandals) and life-stage changes that can undermine civic engagement (see Zukin *et al.*, 2006; Fieldhouse *et al.*, 2007; Dinas, 2013). Second, while these activities can be effective, it is clear from the ongoing generational gaps in political participation that increased provision of these activities has not closed this gap, and that youth electoral engagement remains a concern (House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, 2014).

Amidst these concerns, politicians, practitioners and commentators often point to the need for schools to provide more education about citizenship. This brings us to a third point that is regularly overlooked in these debates: schools play an important role in political socialisation, but often a relatively small one. To increase our chances of addressing these issues effectively, we must also acknowledge that families, the media, political parties and other mobilisation agents also play important roles (although some may argue that some of these groups are currently *contributing* to the problem rather than providing a solution). Finally, we have argued here that education through citizenship has lasting and positive effects on both expressive and electoral political engagement. However, if any type of citizenship education is to be effective, policy announcements in this vein must be backed up with sustained political commitment, practical support for schools and trained teachers (see Keating and Kerr, 2013). Without these vital resources, it will be difficult to live up to the potential that different types of citizenship education can have and give youth political engagement the boost it still clearly needs.

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Appendix 1: Composition of the two outcomes and prior measures of these outcomes

Outcome 1: Electoral participation (Reported voting in Year 15)

Talking with people about the general election on May 6th, we have found that a lot of people didn't manage to vote. How about you, did you manage to vote in the general election?

- Yes, voted
- No, did not vote

Outcome 2: Expressive political participation (Year 15)

Have you ever done any of these things? (*Select all that apply, yes/ no*)

- Attended a public meeting or rally
- Taken part in a public demonstration or protest
- Signed a petition or email/online petition
- Contacted a local councillor or Member of Parliament (MP)
- Contacted your local council about something affecting your neighbourhood
- Got together with other young people to campaign about an issue
- Stopped buying a product because of an email chain letter
- Joined a Facebook group about a political or social issue
- Started a Facebook group about a political or social issue
- Started a Twitter campaign about a political or social issue

Prior measure of electoral participation (Year 7)

We would like to know about what you think you may do in the future. (*please tick one box only on each line*)

<i>Definitely</i>	<i>Probably</i>	<i>Probably</i>	<i>Definitely</i>
<u><i>not do this</i></u>	<u><i>not do this</i></u>	<i>do this</i>	<i>do this</i>

In the future I will. . .

- Vote in general elections

Prior measure of expressive political participation (Year 7)

We would like to know if you think you will take part in any forms of protest in the future. (*Please tick one box only on each line*)

<i>Definitely</i>	<i>Probably</i>	<i>Probably</i>	<i>Definitely</i>
<u><i>not do this</i></u>	<u><i>not do this</i></u>	<i>do this</i>	<i>do this</i>

If I was confronted by something I thought was wrong I would. . .

- Contact a newspaper
- Contact my Member of Parliament (MP)
- Take part in a radio phone-in programme
- Take part in a non-violent protest march or rally

These items were included in a scale generated by factor analysis (Cronbach's alpha = 0.71).