

Chapter 2 Learning Political Engagement

The aim of Chapter 2 is to set out the likely processes in which political engagement is learnt inside schools to inform the first part of our theory on the social reproduction in political engagement. This step is necessary in order to be able to establish in the following chapter where potential barriers to this learning could be taking place in particular within the education system. This chapter also helps to provide clarity on what is meant in this book by the terms education, learning and political engagement. We discuss these terms in detail to unpack the theories in which these terms are embedded. This chapter and book is in part a response to recent economic and political science research that has cast doubt on the relevance of education in increasing political engagement (Persson, 2014, 2013; Kam and Palmer, 2008; Burden, 2009, Lauglo 2016). This research suggests that social class is the main factor influencing political engagement and that education merely proxies for social class. We will address this research and argue that this assumption is partly a misunderstanding of the role of education in the social reproduction of class.

Other scholars have argued that education only exerts an **indirect effect** on political engagement (Nie et al 1996; see also Campbell 2006). The argument here is that **educational qualifications** help in acquiring esteemed **social positions**, and that it is primarily through attaining such positions that people become politically engaged. The relative nature of these positions means that there will always be competition for them regardless of how highly educated a society is in the aggregate. In other words, the number of these positions does not change with ever more people attaining a degree in higher education. By implication, overall levels of political participation will not increase with educational expansion, notwithstanding the positive effect that being well-educated has for individuals themselves in terms of enhancing their political engagement. We explain this theory in greater detail within this chapter and clarify the extent to which this could provide an alternative explanation to barriers in the learning process.

However, others have argued that education does have a **direct effect** on political engagement and that it can be considered as one of its main drivers (Niemi and Junn, 1998; Emler and Frazer, 1999). However, what is meant by the term education has yet to be fully explained

(Hillygus 2005). In order to identify the effect of education and explain the mechanisms through which it operates, we will use two major theories of learning characterised by two metaphors; ‘acquisition’ and ‘participation’ (Sfard 1998). The first approach is frequently used by cognitive and developmental psychologists and understands the student as a consumer of knowledge transferred by the teacher to the student. The second approach to learning, used by many practitioners and educational researchers, understands the student as an active participant in the learning process. The learning then occurs through identifying with, joining and interacting within a community of practice and co-creating knowledge within that community. The benefits and limitations of both approaches for understanding how young people learn to be politically engaged will be explored. The chapter will draw on both approaches to identify the most effective methods for learning political engagement within a school environment. These findings will then be used in Chapter 3 to explore the access of different social groups to these learning opportunities and identify which groups benefit the most from this learning.

The chapter will begin by reflecting on theories that question the role of education in the learning of political engagement. First, we address the literature on education as a measure of social class and then scholars who argue that education only has an indirect effect through certification. We then move on to the main body of the chapter to identify the likely processes of learning political engagement. The purpose of this is to build our theory of the social reproduction of political engagement. In this section we explore the two processes of learning political engagement (**cognitive and participatory approach**) and identify when and where at school the learning using these paradigms might be taking place. Finally, we define political engagement within the context of this book.

Education Levels are Simply a Measure for Social Class

Recent research by political scientists and economists has claimed that **educational attainment**, **years of education** or **expected education** outcomes have no effect on levels of political engagement (Lauglo 2016, Persson, 2014, 2013; Kam and Palmer, 2008; Burden, 2009). The argument is that education is only an approximate measure that is actually capturing an individual’s socio-economic background. The behaviours and attitudes associated with particular class backgrounds are said to be developed through early socialization experiences within the home and are then argued to influence both certain choices in education and political

engagement (Lauglo 2016, Persson, 2014, 2013; Kam and Palmer, 2008; Burden, 2009). The precise preschool experiences that these scholars refer to have yet to be fully established, but Persson (2013) suggests that **parental education**, early **cultural experiences in the home** and cognitive test results at age 5 are the variables that are being captured by measures of years of education in cross sectional empirical research. Kam and Palmer (2008) builds on this theory by arguing that early socialisation provides the opportunity for the transmission from parents to children of attitudes and values such as a general sense of **efficacy**, an appreciation of education, political engagement, a sense of duty and a **'willingness to delay gratification'** (p. 165). With a slightly different take, Lauglo (2016), argues that it is the early learning of public and private responsibility from parents in the home which is crucial. He argues that these attributes are acquired through political discussions with politically active parents and that this results in both the child's desire for higher education attainment and future political engagement. Similarly, Noble and Davies (2009) argue that parental engagement in public affairs is crucial for children's **educational aspirations**. In their research they identified parental engagement in public affairs as the strongest indicator of middle class **cultural capital**. Parental engagement in public affairs was then found to be the strongest predictor of children's self-reported future desire to go to university. Thus the relationship between social class, political engagement, education and **early socialisation** in the home is complex to disentangle. The precise attitudes, values and behaviours being learnt in the home, the precision of how this is taking place and how these learning processes interact with issues of social economic background has to the best of our knowledge yet to be researched, due largely to the difficulties of measuring these dispositions at preschool age and the difficulties in observing political learning processes outside of a school environment (Lauglo 2016 p.434).

When these authors argue that years of education, education attainment or expected years of education have no additional effect what is less clear is the precise meaning of the word education given the limited discussion of this term. Are these authors referring to education as a set of specific learning outcomes developed to a certain level that provide the skills for political engagement? Are they referring to the learning of specific subjects or wider curricular approaches and activities across the whole school? Or are they referring to the social position derived from attaining a qualification at a particular level? If by education they are referring to educational attainment in terms of skills that are said to have no effect – is this a blanket impossibility for education environments to positively contribute to political learning, in

particular for those who do not experience these forms of learning at home? Is it equally impossible that certain education systems or education experiences can negatively affect political engagement for certain groups? The suggestion from the no effect perspective is that national education systems are unable to mitigate or even intensify either the potential for educational success or the potential for political engagement, as both have been preprogrammed by the age of 5. The relevance of social economic background and learning in the home on educational achievement is widely known (for example, Greenstone et al 2013; Hanushek, E.A., 2006). Nevertheless, it is unlikely that many in the educational world would suggest that education systems have no capacity to either enhance or mitigate the educational attainment and labour market performance of different social groups. In fact, the reverse is the case, as a lot of effort has gone into establishing the educational interventions that provide the opportunity to diminish socioeconomic inequalities in achievement (for example, Heckman and Masterov 2007). In this book we will argue that the same possibilities exist regarding the learning of political engagement. We believe the home environment and political discussions in the home are indeed crucial for learning political engagement. Nevertheless, education systems and the learning opportunities offered in schools can and do influence young people's chances of becoming politically engaged.

Although we will use years of education and educational attainment as measures of education in our research, we are fully aware of the limitations of these measurement approaches. Such approaches are based on the assumption that learning is an individual process, that formal education is akin to a medical treatment on the individual brain, and that each single year/dose of education would have an additive linear growth effect on the human brain, resulting in increased political engagement. This assumption thus ignores the social and interactive elements of learning and the participatory nature of what is being learnt i.e. political engagement. It also ignores that some experiences in school may actually be detrimental to learning political engagement, for example, if students experience a lack of voice in their lives in the school environment. The final assumptions underlying this approach are that an experience of a year of education is similar for each student in each school in each country. This is of course is not the case as the schooling system particularly in the UK is very diverse and these experiences differ according to one's social background. If the econometric analysis regarding education suggests that there is no effect would the conclusion then be that political engagement cannot be taught in schools and education is irrelevant, and that there is therefore

no need for young people to attend school if political engagement is the objective? To answer this question, we will explore the theories that suggest that education and learning either have an indirect or a direct effect on political engagement.

The Positional Thesis: Education Only Has an Indirect Effect

Others claim that education does more than simply proxy for social background but influences political engagement still only indirectly. The thesis here is that education gives people a competitive edge and access to higher social positions, and that it is this higher ranking on the **social pecking order** that makes people more engaged. Nie *et al* (1996, 39) call this mechanism the '**positional pathway**' (also called the '**sorting**' effect of education). They argue that education enhances the '**social network centrality**' of individuals. This centrality is crucial for getting access to and influencing politicians, thus giving individuals an incentive to become politically active. Social network centrality, however, is a zero-sum property as the gains for one individual will automatically entail losses for others. This property, according to Nie *et al* (1996), can help explain why overall political participation levels have not increased while society as a whole has steadily become more educated.

Nie *et al* (1996) sparked a huge debate that continues to the present day. It immediately attracted criticism by Helliwell and Putnam (1999), who, with a different measure of relative education, found no evidence for a **positional effect** on the majority of social engagement indicators. Refining the positional effects thesis, Campbell (2006) proposes that the degree of *competition* involved in a political activity can explain why the effect of education is absolute on some socio-political outcomes and positional on others. In his view only when people are in direct competition with one another is the effect positional. He indeed only finds evidence for a positional effect on '**competitive political activity**' (*ibid* p 51). For all the other outcomes in his research (expressive political activity, voting, civic participation, institutional trust and social trust) the absolute (i.e. direct) effect is either stronger than the positional effect or the positional effect is entirely absent. However, recent research has increasingly questioned the absolute effect of education on political engagement and has shown that positional effects do occur for voter turnout (Burden, 2009; Tenn, 2007), **political sophistication** (Highton, 2009)

and **democratic citizenship** (Persson and Oscarsson, 2010). We will engage with this debate in Chapter 7, where the cross-national analyses allows us to partly test the effect of education as either absolute or positional.

Theories of Learning Political Engagement

Although many studies claim that formal education does have a direct influence on the disposition to participate, little in the way of research and theory sufficiently explains why education should have this effect (Hillygus 2005). The basic theory used widely by political scientists and econometrics has been inspired by a cognitive and developmental psychology perspective of learning and applies the '**acquisition metaphor**' (Sfard 1998). The basis for the acquisition metaphor used by a range of theories of learning is that knowledge is a set of abstract objects that an individual can possess. Education is then understood as a system of codifying the knowledge. The codified system is the knowledge held within an education system through the curriculum, teachers and teaching materials. The education system provides the organisation of the systematic transfer of this knowledge according to the developmental age of the student through instruction by the teacher within the classroom (Duffy 1992). This transfer involves internalising and memorising the information by the students. The students can then recall and repeat this knowledge on other occasions and in different contexts. This knowledge includes the basics of reading and writing (Hillygus 2005). Other knowledge and skills can be added to this repertoire such as analytical and problem-solving skills. All these skills can then be acquired and possessed through formal education in a linear process.

The effect of an additional year of education is the additional acquisition of the necessary knowledge and skills to understand how to register and vote, follow politics, and evaluate and assess campaigns and candidates (Rosenstone et al 1993), or, as put more eloquently by Nie et al (1996), through every additional year of education an individual gains the political knowledge and **verbal cognitive proficiency** to enable them to understand the world of politics better and to take more advantage of the opportunities it offers to defend one's interests (Nie et al., 1996). More knowledge and better reading and writing skills are then understood as a possible causal mechanism for higher levels of political engagement. The belief is that the more advanced these skills become, the better the individual is at political engagement and the lower the cost of political participation. Consequently, if an education system was meritocratic it

would then always be the most educated who are most politically engaged. Or, as Campbell (2006) argued from the **absolute effects** of education thesis, if everyone was taught to the same level of education, everyone would participate to the same degree.

There is a general assumption behind much of this literature that specific subjects such as social science and citizenship education would be more helpful in developing these skills than others as they directly aim at fostering political engagement. In fact, when Hillygus (2005) tested the different knowledge and skills on political engagement he found that it was **SAT verbal skills** scores that had a strong and significant effect on political engagement. He found no relationship with **SAT maths scores**. Citizenship education, although contested when measured in terms of years, has been found to have a positive and significant effect on intentions to and actual levels of political engagement (Whitely 2014). Nevertheless, graduates of all academic disciplines, i.e. not just of the social sciences and humanities, have been found to have higher levels of political engagement (Yang and Hoskins forthcoming), which introduces additional questions and complexity to the absolute effect of education thesis.

One of the main strengths of the acquisition metaphor of learning is that we can use it to define the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values for political engagement and establish levels of proficiency in these competences. These qualities have been referred to as **civic competences** (see Hoskins et al 2012). The competences needed for civic engagement is not the focus for this book. However, they are relevant as a step in the learning process of becoming more politically engaged.

The *acquisition* approach to understanding and teaching in education, in which the above theories are situated, is criticised by education researchers from a critical pedagogy perspective. Authors such as Paolo Freire (1970), argue that education based on the acquisition model produces quite the opposite to political engagement. Instead, they would argue that it is this form of education that depoliticises individuals and groups. Freire (1970) argues that there is a connection between teaching the learners as passive recipients of knowledge and passive acceptance of the social structures in society and the status quo.

The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. Freire (1970 p. 165)

The acquisition concept of the education system builds a system of power in which the teacher has the knowledge and therefore the power to be listened to and the student is powerless and obliged to listen (Cho 2010). Thus, the education system is mirroring and reproducing the power structures within society – a point that we shall return to later in Chapter 2 on inequalities in the education system. Political education as opposed to education for acquisition is argued to be a process of actively involving learners in the critical engagement with existing knowledge and developing new and alternative forms of knowledge. From a **critical pedagogy** perspective, dialogical, critical and transformative thinking is the central process of consciousness raising and politicising of learners. Although adding to this we recognise that it is possible, even if it is undesirable, for people to act politically, for example, in the form of voting without a great deal of critical thought.

Participatory Learning Theories

An alternative approach to theories of learning built on the metaphor of acquisition are theories of **learning as participation** (Sfard 1998). These theories typically understand learning as action and part of a joint social enterprise to build and transform communities (Wenger 1998). The emphasis of the participation theories is on social participation in communities and the collaborative development of knowledge and meaning as opposed to instruction and the transference of knowledge via cognitive acquisition. Instead of individuals having abstract knowledge transmitted into their brains and possessing it, people are collaboratively and actively doing, knowing and taking part in a process of **negotiating collective meaning** (Sfard 1998). The goal of learning is community building as opposed to the cognitive metaphor of individual enrichment and instead of a student being a consumer of knowledge they become an apprentice to the community that they are joining (Sfard 1998). These theories are widely

known within the education community but much less known and respected within the economic and political science disciplines.

Social processes of learning through open dialogue and practicing political engagement has been widely cited as an effective way to learn the skills for political engagement (Knowles, Torney-Purta and Barber 2018; Hoskins et al 2017; Hoskins et al 2012; Keating and Janmatt 2016) but why this is the case has not been much discussed. Evidence using communities of practice and constructivist theories of learning suggests that young people learn to become politically engaged in real world environments or contexts that reflect the real world. In other words, the learning is situated (Biesta, Lawy and Kelly 2009). This learning is a social process and is developed through interaction with others within the communities in which they live (Hoskins et al 2012). Through the **social interaction** in real world conditions political identities are developed (Hoskins et al 2012).

Although various **participatory theories of learning** exist the original and seminal text in the **Communities of Practice** theory of learning was the book by Lave and Wenger (1991), who noted through anthropological explorations how learning was socially situated. They developed an analytic approach to learning where learning is understood to happen through social participation in different communities of practice. From this perspective, learning develops through relationships, interactions and conflicts that occur in the process of reproducing and adapting communities. The community forms the context in which meaning is actively negotiated between different actors. Meaning is the product of past interactions, is temporal in nature and develops both through participation (in common activities) and reification (visible codification and recognition of learning achievements).

Integral to this approach is a view that the individual is an engaged agent in the learning process, with a growing sense of membership, identity and belonging. The learner is therefore involved in co-constructing knowledge and skills, and this entails the construction or reconstruction of his/her identity in the process. Haste (2004) argues for the importance of **identity formation** as central to political engagement. She argues that it is central to political engagement to have a feeling of ownership of the topic, to define yourself as part of a group of

people who believe in the value of participation. Knowledge by itself is not sufficient. For the issues to become salient, the individual needs to become engaged in relevant action.

The Lave and Wenger's (1991) **situated learning theory** emphasises the importance of role models in learning, as they embody the form of practice combining the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required for successful performance. People within the communities learn through observation of the role models and then experimenting with acting out these competences by themselves in similar contexts. Wenger (1998) later developed the communities of practice model further through developing a social theory of learning. Within the social theory of learning he creates a typology of learning that includes four dimensions: meaning-making = learning as experience; practice = **learning as doing**; community = **learning as belonging**; and identity = **learning as becoming**.

Qualitative research by Biesta, Lawy and Kelly (2009), who interviewed the same 30 young people in England several times over the period between 2003-2005, found that political learning for young people is situated in multiple communities (Home, work, school and sports and hobbies) and takes place through diverse social relationships in these communities. They found that the prior experiences of the young people affected learning within the new communities and that the structure and rules of the community really matter for the extent that they afford the capacity for learning. Contexts in which the young people felt that they were listened to or could influence learning and teaching were the ones most likely to facilitate political learning.

Our own quantitative study, using the **IEA CIVED** data in 5 different countries in Europe (Hoskins et al 2012) and applying the theory of Communities of Practice, showed that knowledge and skills about democracy and participatory attitudes are learnt through the process of meaning making in discussion with parents and friends about politics, discussion inside the classroom (an open classroom climate) and through social participation in school councils. What we can conclude from the positive findings regarding the student councils is that the process of gaining the identity of a member of a **student council** through a social process of interaction and election by peers has brought members of such councils to the centre of the

school participatory community, and this process has either supported or reinforced their learning of knowledge and skills regarding democracy and their participatory attitudes.

Another participatory theory that relates to the learning of political engagement is critical pedagogy. This theory used within the teaching of political engagement and most notably through the work of Paulo Freire (1970), is built on the foundations on Marxist theories of learning and is useful in understanding the learning of political engagement, regardless of whether you believe in Marxist revolutionary principles or not. Allman describes the founding principle as Praxis, which refers to the idea that only when practice is combined with thought and reflection will political consciousness emerge. This consciousness will then motivate people to become politically active. Experience, including experiences of political engagement, by itself can achieve haphazard learning outcomes including no learning at all. It is not inevitable that experiences are seen with a critical lens. Attempting to learn knowledge without actively engaging both physically and mentally (for example in dialogue with others) in the contents is then also argued to be fruitless as the content has no meaning to the individual. This process is what we have referred to in this chapter as the acquisition metaphor, which Freire (1970) critiqued as the process in which the powerful transmit the status quo to the powerless. Haste (2010 p.163) applies this to the field of political socialisation and suggests that we are not the “passive recipients of a top down conduit of knowledge and values”. Experience first brings the young person to become aware of an issue through actual contact with it. Second, through action on the issue, the individual gains the skills, knowledge, motivation and confidence for competent engagement. Allman (2001) acknowledges that other interpretations of Praxis have sequenced, for example, action and then thought (including theory), or the reverse, namely thought (including theory) and then action, but Allman’s interpretation of Marx’s theory of learning is that these learning processes are simultaneous.

What is of particular importance to Allman (2001) and what we will draw on in the section on schools is that the learning experiences should embody the values and principles of the type of political engagement that is desired, i.e. if you want to teach democratic participation you need to apply these principles in the classroom/school. If you want to teach about social transformation you need to transform the classroom to reflect the values of the new ideal state. For example, if the ideal to be attained is equality, then a prerequisite of social transformation

is equality between learners and teachers. Thus critical pedagogy is argued to be successful through simultaneous experience and critical reflection, but also through coherence between the learning process and the principles on the basis of which they are delivered on the one hand and the desired political outcomes on the other.

Participatory theories of learning also help to explain the most likely process of learning political engagement in the home. The more open and democratic the decision-making in the family is, the more these practices are going to be learnt. The learning is likely to be occurring through interaction, negotiation and co-construction of knowledge between the children and their politically engaged parents, carers, siblings and friends of their parents. The children are observing the more or less overtly political discussions of the adults closest to them and experimenting with trying to understand and engage with them. The parents are then likely to be encouraging these discussions, asking their children about their thoughts and opinions and helping the young people to develop a political identity within the community of the family.

The participatory approach also helps us also to understand how political learning takes place within the adult community. For example, a person or group of people see an important issue within their everyday lives and it is discussed with others and ideas are debated and negotiated. Meaning about the issue is negotiated and co-created within the interested community and actions are decided upon. One of the individuals becomes more engaged on this topic, perhaps reading more information on the issue and becoming more involved in the debates. They start to become important actors or political leaders in the community and move towards the centre of activities deciding on which actions should be taken when. This helps them to develop a stronger feeling of belonging to the group. The greater the levels of success in this process of getting to the centre of the group, the greater the levels of self-confidence and self-efficacy developed and the more the individual identifies with the community.

Social and constructionist theories of learning are currently dominant within educational research community and education research conducted through qualitative research methods. These theories are fairly convincing in particular regarding the process of learning for political engagement. Political engagement is a real-world activity that is about how our communities

should be governed and political engagement happens through social relationships and social participation. Learning through social participation, like the above, example, can be seen to occur at all ages and across many types of contexts and not necessarily within national education systems or schools.

Nevertheless, the learning as participation approach may lead us to a number of false conclusions. First that school and schools systems are less relevant for political learning and that this learning can be left to communities outside the school environment. This conclusion is misguided because if we leave learning political engagement to social occurrences in communities outside of formal learning then inequalities and barriers to these learning experiences could well be even greater. The reason for this is that young people from families with social networks that are already highly politically active will find it easier to join these communities whilst young people without politically active parents will have less opportunities or encouragement to join such communities. We discuss these ideas in more detail in Chapter 3.

A second conclusion that could be drawn from participation theories of learning is that if we build school as a democratic community there will be no need to develop a curriculum or monitor quality or levels of learning. **Participatory theories of learning** can be considered to be at odds with the concept of defining a systematic approach to the curriculum, i.e. in terms of identifying specific knowledge and skills content, quality or levels of learning. Thus, taking these ideas into the school environment, the learning processes could be without regulation and, although rich, could also be chaotic, with the likelihood of gaps occurring in important areas for political engagement for particular groups of young people. Without some forms of regulation and assessment it is not possible to know which students are succeeding, and which need more support and which students need to be helped to be brought to the centre of the learning communities.

However, if we understand the school in terms of both participatory theories and acquisition theories of learning then the school can be a site that draws from the best that these two understandings of learning for political learning have to offer. The school therefore could be understood as a participatory community for learning about living in a diverse society through living this experience in the school. It can also be seen as an environment for engaging in

democratic practices, reflecting on these experiences and reflecting on experiences from outside school (Daniels 2001). Using the acquisition metaphor, the school could then also have the responsibility to facilitate the process of learning political engagement for each young person and enhance the quality of their political engagement by providing each learner with the breadth of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (i.e. as competences) needed for effective and democratic political engagement. Educators can assess and evaluate the learning that is needed to enhance engagement and the quality of political engagement and can use either subject lessons like 'citizenship education' to deliver the content and offer learning processes within the school community to deliver political learning.

Nevertheless, school communities are not always open and democratic environments. Particularly in the recent policy climate, schools are often based on strict rules with a system of rewards and punishment. In addition, young people are not treated by all teachers in a fair way with differing expectations of students according to where they come from and the different social groups to which they belong (Reay 2006). When young people do not feel able to engage openly in the classroom discussion or participate on an equal footing in a debate the classroom becomes a restricted learning environment (Fuller & Unwin, 2004, p.3) for this individual or social group. These young people are then on the edge of the community. For a school to really be a democratic learning community it may well take more effort and time to bring all voices into discussions and decision making. Democracy has to be a priority in schools in order to devote sufficient time to the processes needed to learn these competences. Schools with regular high-stake testing and where the priority is labour market preparation the possibilities for learning political engagement may be limited. This may well allow certain social groups to advance and socially reproduce political engagement whilst other young people are left behind on the periphery of the community. These ideas will be taken forward within Chapter 3.

How Can Schools Facilitate the Learning of Political Engagement?

The participatory theories of learning help us to understand which methods of learning are most effective for political engagement. If we borrow from the participatory theories of learning the understanding that the school is a community that young people join and participate in for the negotiation of meaning and norms of the community, then there are many activities in a school that can facilitate political learning.

*An **Open Climate of Classroom Discussion***

The most frequently cited of these methods is an open climate of classroom discussion (Hahn 1998, Torney-Purta et al, 2002a, Campbell 2008, Hoskins et al 2016; Quintelier and Hooghe 2011, Keating and Janmaat 2016, Knowles, Torney-Purta, and Barber 2018). This refers to a situation where students feel free to ask questions, bring up issues for discussion, express their own opinions, feel able to make up their own minds, and perceive that the teachers respect their opinion and present different sides to an argument. The characteristics of a classroom based on these principles clearly follow the participatory approaches to learning where learning is happening through interaction, negotiation and through joint enterprise. There is a great deal of research ,using both cross-sectional and longitudinal data, that demonstrated that the open classroom method of learning is effective in enhancing political engagement (Torney-Purta et al, 2002a, Campbell 2008, Hoskins et al 2012, Quintelier and Hooghe 2011, Keating and Janmaat 2016, Knowles, Torney-Purta, and Barber 2018.), positive attitudes towards political engagement (Geboers et al 2013 p.164), critical thinking (ten Dam and Volman 2004), citizenship skills (Finkel and Ernst 2005), and political knowledge (McDevitt and Kiousis 2006). It should be taken into account that Geboers et al's (2012) systematic review of evidence found that the evidence of these positive effects was stronger for political engagement and civic attitudes and weaker for political knowledge.

Political Activities in the School

The participatory processes of learning political engagement also happen when young people are offered the chance to practice political engagement and decision making at school (Hoskins

et al 2012; Keating and Janmaat 2016; Knowles, et al 2018.). These can be through activities such as class councils, school parliaments, clubs and societies and through mock elections, and there is considerable evidence for their effectiveness (Hoskins et al 2012; Keating and Janmaat 2016). Youth participation activities are said to lead to the development of skills such as deliberation, compromise, speaking in public, expressing an opinion, learning to work in groups, and assimilating other people's opinions (Quintelier 2008, p. 357). In addition, they are also argued to provide greater awareness of issues in their communities and build the efficacy needed to become involved in creating the changes (McFarland and Thomas, 2006, p. 404; Keating and Janmaat 2016).

Citizenship Education

Since the majority of evidence suggests that learning for political engagement takes place through participatory learning processes, it may be a surprise to have a specific subject and curriculum for political learning, as studying a subject in a classroom could well be very decontextualized (not situated) and be limited in its interactivity. But as Haste (2010) alluded to, citizenship education can be understood in different ways according to the different metaphors of learning that we have used in this chapter. First, using the acquisition metaphor and the **cognitive theories of learning**, we can postulate that teaching political knowledge will lead to higher levels of political participation and reduce the cost/effort towards political participation in the future. Second, through organising political engagement activities in the class (simulation activities, mock elections and student led debates) that are situated in relevant and current issues that affect young people lives, this then allows the students to actively construct their knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed for future political engagement. The evidence weighs more heavily on the success of the participatory approaches to learning political engagement. Nevertheless, this does not imply that learning political knowledge is not important. It simply means that using a participatory approach to learning political knowledge is more likely to result in political action later on.

Research on citizenship education has identified both no effects and positive effects on political engagement, with different delivery methods likely to produce different effects. Experimental

design research has shown us that participatory learning inside citizenship education classes is effective. For example, the **Students Voice** programme in the US that targeted disadvantaged urban schools found that contextualising debates in local politics and using interactive methodologies were effective for enhancing **political knowledge**, **political efficacy** and political participation (Feldman et al 2007). In Germany research by Oberle and Leunig (2016), who also used an experimental design, found that using simulation games inside citizenship education classes were effective for teaching knowledge about the EU and increasing levels of trust, in particular for more socioeconomically deprived groups.

In the UK Citizenship education has been a mandatory part of the national curriculum from 11-16 in England since 2002. Schools are free to decide on the content, mode of delivery and volume of citizenship education and schools started to vary substantially in these matters, accordingly (Kerr et al 2007). Some schools have taken the route of offering Citizenship education as a specific subject, some as a cross curricular approach, whilst others have preferred to take a more obviously participatory route by introducing citizenship activities into the whole of the school (Keating and Janmaat 2016). How citizenship education is implemented may well have consequences for its effectiveness.

Political Engagement

Before finalising this chapter, it is necessary to define the concept of political engagement. This definition is more pragmatic and developed in conjunction with the data. It is therefore less theoretical than our concepts of education and learning. The purpose of this is to enable accurate analysis of the processes of learning and inequalities within these processes.

Confusion can arise around the term political engagement because scholars understand it in different ways. These differences mainly concern the scope of the concept, with some using a definition that only comprises different forms of political participation (e.g. Macedo 2005) while others entertain a much broader understanding including attitudes and dispositions such as political interest, engaging in political discussions, keeping track of news, political efficacy

and political trust (e.g. Norris 2000; and Solt 2008). Finally, from a participatory learning perspective political engagement can also be understood as part of the learning process (Freire 1970 Allman etc.).

In line with Macedo (2005), we use it in a narrow sense to only refer to adult political activities. We consciously exclude other elements such as political efficacy and interest from the definition as these are also often considered as predictors of participation (see, for instance, Blais 2000 and Moeller et al 2014) and we want to avoid confusing components with predictors of political engagement. In addition, and for research purposes, we refer to political activities at school as part of the learning component rather than the outcome of political activities.

Another reason to adopt a narrow definition is that we wish to reserve the term for outcomes that have an observable influence on collective decision-making: it is people's actual adult political participation (i.e. behaviour) that shapes politicians' responses rather than their attitudes, dispositions or cognitive abilities. We hasten to add that the only exception to this rule is intentions to participate, which we will also consider as one of the outcomes captured under the label political engagement. This is because participatory intentions are closely aligned with actual participation, even though intentions need not always be acted upon (Achen and Blais 2010). In other words, people who say they will vote will most often also cast their vote. Moreover, as this book focuses on young people, including minors, tapping intentions are the only way to get some idea of actual future participation for those political activities that are either not available for minors (such as voting) or that are unusual for them to engage in at a very young age (such as joining a political party or taking part in a demonstration).

The forms of political participation we will examine in this book are voting, joining a political party, legal protest and illegal protest. Not only do these forms cover quite a range of political activities, they also represent a good mix of more conventional and more alternative, widespread and rarer, influential and less influential, and accepted and more controversial forms of participation. Voting is an obvious choice. Although this conventional mode of participation is relatively unpopular among young people (Sloam 2014), it is the most common and widespread form of political activity, also among that age group (Keating and Janmaat

2016). What also makes this an interesting outcome is the social gap in participation, with the less well educated as a rule showing lower voting levels (Sloam 2013). Long term developments, moreover, suggest that these inequalities are widening: the gap between low and high incomes in electoral participation has become ever more pronounced over the last 30 years (Lawrence 2015). As the focus of our book is precisely on social inequalities in participation, any kind of participation that displays such disparities is of obvious interest to us. There is discussion over the question of whether the lack of popularity of voting among youth is a temporary phenomenon that will disappear as people grow older (thus constituting an age effect) or whether the present generation of young people shows permanently lower voting levels than previous generations of young people (Lieberman, Inglehart etc). Evidence from the United States suggests it is an age effect as turnout has not changed among young people over the past four decades and the differences with older age groups have stayed the same (Sloam 2014). In Britain, however, young people have become ever less prone to cast their votes and the gap with older groups has been increasing, which is indicative of a cohort effect, or a combination of both an age and a cohort effect. This is disconcerting as it indicates ever lower turnout rates among new generations reaching adulthood.

At least this had been the trend until the 2017 election. Initial data and analysis suggested a significant increase in youth voter turnout in this election, indicating that a so-called ‘youthquake’ had occurred. Ipsos MORI and the Essex Continuous Monitoring Survey (Whiteley and Clarke 2017) both estimated an increase in youth turnout of around 20 percentage points. However, better quality data from the British Election Study and more sophisticated data analysis contested these findings suggesting that there was little in the way of evidence of a significant increase in young people’s voter turnout (Prosser et al 2018). Nevertheless, dramatic increases in the youth vote towards Labour (Sloam et al 2018) and the change in the role of young people in political campaigning within this election is much less disputed (Pickard 2018).

Similar to voting, party membership is often thought of as a conventional mode of participation that has largely fallen out of favour among the electorate and particular amongst the young (Lieberman, Inglehart etc.). Being the preserve of the highly engaged, it is a much rarer form of participation, but also one that is likely to be much more influential than voting. Recent

developments within the Labour party can illustrate this: the far left candidate Jeremy Corbyn, who emerged victorious in the party's leadership contest, was elected by many new members flocking to the party. In fact, this increase has been so dramatic – from 190,000 in May 2015 to 515,000 in July 2016 (Whiteley et al 2018), that joining a political party seems to have made a comeback as a viable form of political participation. As with voting, there is a pronounced social skew in party membership. In fact, white middle class elderly males are overrepresented in each of the four major parties in Britain (The Guardian 4 January 2018).

The third form of participation we chose to examine is **legal protest**. It captures activities such as partaking in demonstrations, organising and signing petitions, boycotting products and wearing badges. This form is often labelled as alternative and tends to be more popular among young people because of the more informal and egalitarian nature of these activities (Lichterhan 1996; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). These forms of collective action also allow for greater input from the participants which may contribute to their sense of agency and efficacy. Yet, the number of people engaging in these activities, particularly in demonstrations, is small by comparison to voting (Keating 2015). Moreover, in Britain social disparities in this form of participation are even starker than for voting. While graduates vote 1.1 times as much as the average citizen, they take part in demonstrations 2.6 times as much (Sloam 2014: 672). In Germany and the United States the difference in these social gaps between conventional and alternative forms of participation is much less pronounced. Particularly in Britain, therefore, engaging in legal protest seems to be an elite affair.

Illegal protest is the last form of participation we are interested in exploring. It includes actions such as partaking in a violent demonstration, blocking traffic and occupying public buildings. This form is controversial as it involves civil disobedience and breaking the law. Consequently, the number of people engaging in this form of participation is very low. Yet illegal protest is almost always covered by the media, and this high visibility could make it an effective strategy in terms of influencing policy makers. Although the debate among political philosophers about the place of illegal protest in liberal democracies is ongoing - with some defending violent forms of disobedience (e.g. McCloskey 1980; Kabat-Zinn 2003) – we believe that a lack of consensus on its desirability should not stop us from investigating it. If some students or groups plan to engage in illegal activities to protest against something they believe to be wrong and would like to see changed, such activities can be seen as a form of political participation, just

like voting or joining a political party, and therefore merit our attention. We are particularly interested in this form of participation as it may display a reverse social skew. Working class youth may feel they lack the verbal skills and social etiquette to participate effectively in legal and conventional ways, and may therefore be more inclined to resort to illegal activities to make their voices heard. The 2011 London riots have been interpreted by some along these lines (Hegarty 16 August 2011 (Guardian); Lamprianou 2013). Indeed, Armstrong (2012: 1) believes that such activities are an acceptable and emancipating form of participation for the disadvantaged:

“Rioting is a legitimate form of struggle that working class people and sections of the oppressed have resorted to time and time again to defend their interests. Indeed, they have found them an exhilarating experience – a brief moment of liberation.”

A conspicuous omission in the forms of participation to be explored in this book is **online participation**. We have no good theoretical argument for disregarding online political activities, only a pragmatic one: the International Citizenship and Civic Education Study (ICCS) of 2009, the data source that we will use to compare across countries, did not include items to measure this form of participation with. Other data sources investigating political participation among young people across Europe that do include such items are unfortunately not available.

Conclusions

This chapter has established the first part of the theory of the social reproduction of inequalities in political learning and identified the most likely approaches to learning political engagement. It has identified the main two paradigms for understanding the processes in which political learning is likely to take place both inside and outside school and referred to these as participation and acquisition. The acquisition paradigm positions the transmission of political knowledge from teachers to students as the first step in learning political engagement and then proposes that in the future this enables young people to have a better understanding of politics and have gained the ability to engage with it. The participation paradigm, conceptualises political knowledge to be co-created through participatory learning processes including discussions and debates within communities such as schools and families. It is this experience of participation and co-creation of meaning that develops young people’s qualities that lead to

future engagement, for example, a political identity, political efficacy and sense of belonging to a political community. We proposed that both these paradigms can actually be complimentary in terms of understanding political learning and even a necessity within a citizenship education curriculum aimed at developing informed and politically engaged young people.

The participatory forms of learning can be found within a school environment such as through an open classroom climate across subject disciplines and political activities at the school such as school councils. The acquisition of knowledge is likely to occur through specific subject disciplines such as citizenship education where subject knowledge and skills are pre-established and the learning can be tested.

In order to establish where inequalities in learning political engagement are occurring, the next step in this book is to identify where the barriers to this learning could be taking place. This is part two of the theory of the social reproduction of inequalities in political engagement and the topic of Chapter 3. In Chapters 4 to 7 of this book we will measure and test access to participatory and acquisition forms of learning for different social groups and at different stages of education. We will assess whether gaining access to these experiences has differential effects for different social groups in terms of mitigating or enhancing social inequalities in political engagement.

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