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Educating for citizenship: some lessons from England 2008

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Abstract

This paper stems from a study of 45 secondary schools and colleges in England during 2007/08. Using documentary analysis, interviews with staff, students and parents, surveys of staff and students, and official statistics, we look at a number of potential outcomes related to citizenship. These include voting behaviour, charity work, and preparation for later life. In contrast to standard school effectiveness and improvement studies, we find that student/family background and institution-levels factors are relatively minor determinants of citizenship outcomes. If accepted this suggests that improvements here can come easier than in more traditional school outcomes, since they appear to be more sensitive to teacher and students experiences. In particular, we propose further investigation of the promise of student autonomy, staff prioritisation of student aspirations, and mutual respect between all actors in education.

Introduction

In England, the Every Child Matters agenda, emerging from the Children Act of 2004 - http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/participation/ - proposes a number of outcomes for all students, including being healthy and safe, making a positive contribution to society, and achieving economic well-being. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has introduced the 14-19 Reform Programme in September 2008. Among its objectives is the preparation of confident and responsible citizens. At time of writing the government has also recently backed laws making it a requirement for schools to consult pupils on every aspect of their education from teaching to uniform (Stewart 2008). School governing bodies must 'invite and consider pupil's views'. Several teacher organisations have objected, claiming that consultation works where it is done because it is appropriate not because it is legally enforced. However, the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child – http://www.therightssite.org.uk – has been ratified in the UK since 1991, and makes clear that children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions affecting them. And this applies to schools and colleges as well as to families and wider society.

One of the ways that legislation and government guidance has envisaged these rights for children being embodied is through elected schools councils. The National Curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and for Citizenship refers to school councils as central to a school-wide approach - http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk. Every Child Matters suggests the percentage of

children participating in election of school council representative as an important indicator of success. The councils are now, reportedly, consulted during statutory inspections, and are used as an outlet for feeding back the results of inspection to all students - http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/.

It is not sufficient that children have rights as students. They must know what these rights are, and be encouraged by their teachers to use them (Dobozy 2007). And small-scale studies suggest that citizenship has to be fully integrated into the working of the school (as opposed to treated as merely a curriculum subject) if children are to become aware of these rights, and the responsibilities that accompany them (Cowell et al. 2008). There is a reasonable body of evidence to suggest that school and experience at school, as well as family background, is related to the formation of social attitudes and participation in civic activities (Gorard and Smith 2008, Paterson 2009). This paper investigates that relationship further, presenting a snapshot position of citizenship preparation (and related outcomes) for the year 2007/08. Here, we focus primarily on the reports and experiences of students in the 14-19 age range, comparing these across types of educational provision and experiences at school/college.

Methods

Our sample of 45 institutions involved in the delivery of education and training for 14 to 19 year old students included 11-16, 11-18, and 13-18 schools, independent schools, special projects linked to pupil referral units, and general, specialist and sixth-form FE colleges. The sample represents the range and frequency of educational institutions in England in terms of size, intake, outcomes, denomination, and subject specialism (from Edubase, and PLASC/NPD – for a fuller discussion of these official datasets, see Gorard and See 2009). Locations varied from metropolitan to rural hamlets, and from economically privileged to some of the most deprived wards in England. For each institution we have assembled a linked dataset consisting of:

- School/college and student-level records from Edubase, the National Pupil Database (NPD), and the Pupil-level Annual Schools Census (PLASC);
- Documentary evidence provided by each institution about their aims and objectives, visions for the future, staffing and workload. From this we analysed the number and range of courses on offer in each institution organisation.
- A survey with a 76% response rate of all year 11 students (2,700) and 50% of year 12 students (2,200) asking about the process of choosing courses, preference for styles of teaching, and enjoyment of education;
- A survey with a 20% response rate of all staff on roll (1,130) asking about their development, workload, future priorities, and styles of teaching delivery;
- Interviews with 228 teaching staff, managers, and governors concerning the curriculum, teaching and learning, developments in collaboration, and future plans;
- Telephone and group interviews with 67 parents or carers, in addition to parent governors, concerning the experiences of their child;
- Individual and group interviews with 798 year 11 and 12 students (including 98 with learning needs or disabilities, and 82 disaffected or disengaged)

discussing opportunities to learn, support to make choices, their experience of teaching and learning, and what was important to them in coming to school or college.

- We also have comments stemming from the surveys, additional data on student destinations from some institutions, field notes and observations.

The analysis in this paper is largely based on a combined numeric data file using the individual responses to the survey of 4,900 students, the characteristics of their institutions – including student mix and course entry patterns - an estimate of the number of curriculum areas offered, and school-level summaries (means, or percentages above a threshold level) of responses to the staff survey.

Seven of the student survey variables have been selected as potential outcomes, relevant to citizenship and/or well-being. These are:

- Prepared for world of work
- Prepared for future relationships
- Prepared to handle my own money
- Prepared to handle my own health
- Volunteered to help charity or local organisation
- Voted in school/college elections
- Would vote in election this week

These are each treated as the dependent variable, in turn, in a series of binary logistic regression analyses, with the other variables outlined above used as potential explanatory variables. The explanatory variables are entered in stages (phases, or levels). First the individual student background characteristics, such as sex. Then the institution-level characteristics, such as curriculum offer and staff responses, and finally the individual student responses to other survey items about educational experiences. At each stage, the addition of new variables can only explain variation in the outcomes that is left unexplained by the previous stage. The stages are selected for several reasons. Perhaps most importantly they represent a kind of biographical order from birth characteristics to decisions about what to do at age 16. Placing the institution-level variables before the individual ones also allows the greatest possible role for the influence of institutions on student outcomes (although each model has been run in several orders and the same substantive conclusions emerge each time). And the order minimises the possibility of latent tautology in the individual student responses. The base level for each model simply reflects the distribution of responses to the outcome variable (50% means that 50% of students agreed for example). Where the base level is nearer 100%, there is too little variation for logistic regression to work well. It is from the base level that the explanatory variables can be used to create a better explanation of student outcomes. Thus, the variation explained at each stage is:

(Percentage predicted correctly-(100-base))/(100-base)

Variance unexplained (100-percentage predicted correctly) could be due to a variety of factors including model mis-specification or transcription and recording errors. The most likely causes of unexplained variance are missing variables (we can only use what we have, and this omits factors such as motivation and special needs), and the

inherent unpredictability of individuals (we would not expect to explain 100% of the variation in any outcomes).

At each stage, new variables are entered into the model, and then removed in backward stepwise fashion using the likelihood ratio. Thus, some variables are not used in each model, as they contribute nothing to the outcome, and some variables are not used in any model. Each explanatory variable that is retained has a calculated coefficient that gives an idea of its relative importance to the model. The coefficient is like an odds for one category compared to another (so that 0.5 for sex might mean that males were only half as likely *ceteris paribus* to have the specified outcome). Alternatively, the coefficient for a real number variable is a multiplier (so that 0.9 for institution-level FSM might mean that the specified outcome is only 0.9 times as likely for every percentage of school intake eligible for free school meals). The precise figures are not key here (there are too many compromises in the data, and the model is best fit *a posteriori* only), but their relative importance and the direction of 'influence' could be an important clue to the determinants of outcomes. The focus below is on those variables that appear repeatedly and in a stable manner in the models, in the belief that such a meta-view is less likely to be misled by spurious correlations (or similar).

A summary of findings

Seven possible self-reported outcomes relevant to the preparation of citizens appear in Table 1. Years 11 and 12 are very similar, and will be treated together in much of what follows. Some of the scores, for citizenship participation, are quite low, whereas some, for preparedness for the future, are surprisingly high. The figures for participation in a school election are slightly lower than those reported to OFSTED (2007) by younger children ranging from year 6 to year 10, of whom 43% voted in one school year. The figures for charity assistance are much lower here than in the OFSTED study which found 65% had helped raise money for charity in one school year. Part of the difference could be age, in that primary schools may be more active in charity collections involving all students. But most of the difference could be that the OFSTED focus was on what took place at school, whereas our focus was on out-of-school activities (voluntary).

Table 1 – Percentage of students agreeing with each statement

	Year 11	Year 12
Prepared for world of work	58	62
Prepared for future relationships	67	71
Prepared to handle my own money	70	71
Prepared to handle my own health	78	79
Volunteered to help charity or local organisation	25	30
Voted in school/college elections	38	35
Would vote in election this week	44	46

Source: student surveys　　　　　　　　N=2700　　　　　　　N=2200

Overall, 92% of staff report making the development of good citizens a priority. Schools and colleges in which more staff report their priority to be developing citizenship actually have students less likely to participate in the activities in Table 1.

One possible interpretation of this result, and others like it, is that staff priorities are set by a hierarchy of concerns, with priority going to areas of weakness rather than immediately leading to areas of strength. This would have implications for our consideration of the staff interviews, where we are generally unable to relate the reported staff actions and priorities to the actual experience of the students. Where we are able to compare, a similar pattern (of reverse correlation) emerges.

There is insufficient space here to provide detailed results of the regression analyses and from the interviews for each of the seven outcomes in Table 1. Anyway, the outcomes form two clusters of very similar patterns. Here we present results for one of the preparedness outcomes, and one of the civic participation outcomes.

Possible determinants of citizenship participation

Which students vote in school/college elections is used as an illustration of the more general pattern of citizenship participation (Table 2). The model is reasonably strong, explaining around 50% of the remaining variation. All three stages/levels help to explain variation in responses.

Table 2 – Accuracy of model for "voted in school elections"

	Percentage explained
Background	12
School/College	20
Individual responses	47

N=4900 for this and all subsequent tables

The first stage is the student background. Girls and students from professional families are more likely to report voting in school/college elections (Table 3). We should not read too much into the boy/girl difference since the vagaries of sampling and consent mean that the single-sex girl schools are very different in type to the boys schools, and this may account for some of this difference. What is of more interest perhaps is the lack of association with so many other background variables, such as poverty, ethnicity, language, in-migration and so on (see discussion).

Table 3 – Individual background variables in model for "voted in school elections"

Variable	Odds
Sex (female)	1.40
Mother professional	1.23
Father professional	1.25

Note: the coefficients or odds would appear as Exp(B) in the model. For example, a female student in our cases is 1.4 times as likely to report voting as a male.

The second stage is the institution context and the reports from staff (Table 4). Cases in cities and with high proportions of students eligible for free school meals, an indicator of poverty, report less citizenship participation. More interestingly, students in institutions where staff report prioritising citizenship are also less likely to vote in elections. The sequence is obscure. It is possible that staff feel that they have to prioritise in areas where their own students might be weaker. Certainly there is a

positive association between staff reportedly trying to raise student aspirations and reported voting behaviour.

Table 4 – School/College variables in model for "voted in school elections"

Variable	Odds
Urban location	0.56
FSM institution (%)	0.82
Staff priority to improving own skills (%)	0.90
Staff priority to developing citizens (%)	0.61
Staff priority to increase HE (%)	0.63
Staff priority to raising aspirations (%)	1.56

The final stage of the model involves student reports of their school/college experiences. Students are more likely to vote in elections where they receive individual attention from staff, experience autonomy in learning and have contact with students on other programmes or via work experience (Table 5).

Table 5 – Individual response variables in model for "voted in school elections"

Variable	Odds
Learn also in work environment	1.28
Can work at own pace	1.20
Enough individual attention	1.23
Contact with other students	1.32
Small classes	1.17
Teachers for specialist subjects	1.19
Employment guidance	1.28

A number of institutions use accreditation awards that make civic and community engagement part of assessed curricula such as ASDAN, or encourage involvement in other schemes like the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. More commonly, schools and colleges have introduced various mechanisms for developing students' capacity to express their own views and engage in decision-making, such as student councils, representation on governing bodies, and student surveys to inform organisational planning and processes. But citizenship in action, as exemplified in interactions between students and staff, may be as important as formal pedagogy and principles for the development of citizenship behaviour, such as voting and public service. Our student accounts suggest some differences could be based on a feeling of being treated more as a young adult in some institutions – notably colleges and independent schools – and in year 12.

For example, a student in a comprehensive school says:

> Some teachers don't respect you and wonder why you cause so much trouble… The teachers say we want respect from you but they don't normally show it to us. They're the teacher they're always right, we're the kid and we don't know what we are going on about.

Whereas, a year 12 student in an Academy says:

It's not intimidating because people are actually here to learn. When we were at school people just wanted to leave and get it over and done with

And a student in a specialist FE college says:

Everyone in my [old] school wants to quit sixth form, loads of them are coming here as well. Cos they've heard such good things about it; and no-one likes the… like, the teachers at 6th form, and it's more laid back here… the teachers are more sort of friendly, do you know what I mean?

Another in a more general FE college says:

Teachers are much, they respect you more, talk to you like, not like you're a little kid, treat you with a bit of respect, give you a bit of leeway if you're like that with them, if you do what they do, they'll be alright with you.

Possible determinants of preparedness for future life

Table 6 looks at the model for those students reportedly prepared for the world of work. Very little of the variation in responses to questions about preparedness for work, health, relationships, or handling money is explicable by student background or institution-level factors. The only variables that seem to matter are those relating to individual experiences of education. Nevertheless, the model here is a good one explaining 50% of the variation.

Table 6 – Accuracy of model for "prepared for world of work"

	Percentage explained
Background	3
School/College	7
Individual responses	49

It is only the coefficients for student experience (the third stage) that contribute much to this model (Table 7). There is some similarity to the determinants of civic participation (Table 5 above). Students already involved in learning delivered at work, and those given good employment guidance, report being more prepared for the world of work – possibly because their exposure demonstrates the demands of work or because different kinds of students are currently learning at work. Students also feel better prepared when they have had enough chance to discuss issues in small enough groups. It is possible, of course, that factors such as these are a disguised intake effect such that schools with smaller classes are different in kind and in student intake from those with large classes. That is one reason why the models are run in three stages. The results in Table 7 are presented after accounting for student background and institutional variables. This strengthens the claim that their explanatory power is independent of the earlier stages. What does it all mean?

Table 7 – Individual response variables in model for "prepared for world of work"

Variable	Odds
Learn also in work environment	1.47
Employment guidance	1.52

| Enough small classes | 1.27 |
| Enough chance to discuss in class | 1.35 |

Discussion

Given the range of material and sources available for analysis here, perhaps the most remarkable finding is how few of these are related to variables representing the outcomes. Of course, there may be important explanatory variables that are not included in the material available to us, and the variables that are available may be incomplete, indirect measures, or poorly specified. Nevertheless, some of the variables lacking association with any outcomes, as assessed by these means, are worthy of note.

We are used to patterns of participation and attainment in education being heavily stratified by student background factors such as prior attainment, sex, ethnicity and parental occupation. In standard school effectiveness studies, around 80% of the difference between institutions is attributed to the nature of the student intake. The outcomes where students reported having enough say in their own learning, and being prepared to handle their own money, health, and future relationships, were all unrelated to student background, and to the different types of institutions students attend. In traditional terms we could say that there is no 'school effect' on these outcomes. Looked at the other way, the factors which are largely unrelated to *any* outcomes include the country of origin of the student, their prior attainment scores, the overall school results of the students' institution, its (numeric) range of curriculum offer, ethnic mix, denomination, economic region, and local index of deprivation. Other factors unrelated to the outcomes are the institution-level views of staff relating to the introduction of new qualifications, their encouragement of vocational routes, their style and activities of teaching, sources of stress, barriers to partnerships, and their reported prioritisation of exam results.

These negative findings are all in sharp contrast to standard 'school effectiveness' studies focusing only on attainment as an outcome, which invariably find prior attainment and student background to be key predictors (e.g. Gorard 2009). If these new findings are accepted as reasonable, then they illustrate again how much more there is to 14-19 education than exam-based attainment, and they suggest that improvements in citizenship education do not need to overcome all of the stratified barriers that more narrowly focused 'school improvement' faces.

More in line with decades of research in the sociology of education, the occupation of each student's mother and father generally had a consistent but sometimes weak relationship with several outcome variables. Professional and managerial parents were associated with greater student aspiration for professional occupations, preparedness for work, participation in charity, and past and future participation in elections. Given this, what does the study suggest might be being done to encourage students from other backgrounds?

Insofar as a potential lever is identifiable from the staff views it must be that encouraging staff to see themselves as developing their own teaching and career skills may have direct positive benefits for students, and more directly than a focus on

specific issues of attainment, equity and participation. One exception, noted above, is that a staff priority to raising student aspirations is positively associated with several outcomes.

Several small groups of student-reported experiences are repeatedly associated with positive outcomes. As such, these robust links are worth further consideration, even though their causal models are unclear. One of these is guidance - about future employment or future learning opportunities. Those students reporting good guidance report being better prepared for their futures in terms of handling their health, personal relationships and money, and in terms of the future world of work. Guidance is also positively related to students being encouraged to want to learn more, education being about important experiences, and to preparation for citizenship. Of course, these results could be partly hidden intake effects, and the confidence that students portray over money and health might be illusory. However, it is difficult to imagine how else outcomes such as these could be assessed other than by self-report. There is at least a *prime facie* indication that guidance is useful and makes a difference even when student intake and institution-level factors are accounted for.

Another area of possible interest is the experience of students learning off-site. Here, however, the results are not as clear and this may be a disguised intake 'effect'. Students involved in learning delivered at work report being more prepared for the world of work. This could be as much a consequence of who chooses (or is chosen) to have learning delivered off-site as a consequence of that learning itself. But for some students the importance of learning off-site is clear both for students and adults:

> We find that, it never ceases to amaze me, they are completely different creatures down at xxx. I've heard, I think, one young lady, she came from yyy and apparently from all accounts, she was a bit of a horror, you know, and she's absolutely perfect at xxx. She behaves herself. She does as she's asked. And when you ask her why, she says it's the way she's spoken to. She feels that sometimes teachers don't speak to her with the respect that she deserves.

> We have a young man from zzz. Apparently he's autistic, apparently we've been told that he can't read and can't write. Within two sessions at xxx, he was reading to us off a fire extinguisher because he was doing his health and safety. So, you know, there are no barriers.

There were several reports of the greater respect experienced between staff and learners in FE colleges and workplaces:

> Teachers are much, they respect you more, talk to you like, not like you're a little kid, treat you with a bit of respect, give you a bit of leeway if you're like that with them, if you do what they do, they'll be alright with you. They won't talk to like a little child or look down at you or anything, so that's cushedy.

A third cluster of student experiences could be described in terms of the quality and variety of learning delivery. Having enough chances for discussion, learning in small groups, and variation in lesson delivery (including practical work and field trips) are positively related to being prepared for the world of work, for handling health issues, and the importance of experiences at school. Students find lessons interesting, enjoy

education more generally, and report having enough of a say in their own education, when the classes are small, they can discuss their ideas in class, the teachers are appropriately specialist, and there is variation in delivery and activity. The same kinds of students are more likely to vote in school elections. The same kinds of outcomes are also positively associated with students reporting contact with students on other courses or programmes (which might refer to social or pastoral activities, or to vertical organisations such as houses and competitions, or simply a small institution). These students are also more likely to continue in education. One reason could be that they become aware of the range of possibilities open to them.

A final small group of student experiences concerns autonomy. Being encouraged by teachers to make up their own minds (being treated like adults), and being allowed to work at their own pace are related to students wanting to learn, finding lessons interesting, enjoying education more generally, and a willingness to vote.

There is, of course, the danger of a form of tautology in some of these associations with student experiences since the 'outcomes' are themselves rather like reports of student experiences. However, it should be recalled that these few variables explain/predict the clear majority of the variance that is explicable in most outcomes. Unlike standard school effectiveness research where background/intake explains most of the variation in test scores and school-level data a lot of the remainder, this study places most of the variance in a wider set of outcomes at the individual student experience and teacher/classroom level. Our findings suggest that the type of institution a student attends has less to do with other outcomes than previous research might indicate. What appears to matter slightly more are mixed student intakes in schools and colleges, opportunities for young people to have contact with each other even when on different programmes in the same institution, and a variety of educational experiences through partnership delivery. This mixing between, within and across institutions is positively related to occupational aspirations, plans for participation, and confident and responsible citizenship – whatever the student's own background.

Acknowledgements

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