
Title: The Power of Active Citizenship Education

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This paper will examine the role of active citizenship in education, and the mandate from education, young people, community, and the economy to develop successful, contributing citizens empowered to use their skills to make a difference.

In 2019, 10% more young people than adults volunteered regularly (Volunteer Scotland, 2019), with 40% of young people volunteering in their spare time. During the Covid-19 lockdown period, 76, 000 individuals signed up to offer their time through the Scotland Cares campaign to support those in need (Scottish Government, 2020).

Lockdown highlighted and exacerbated many of the challenges that our local communities face. The Trussell Trust (2020) reported a 107% increase in children accessing food support. 75% of young people reported experiencing loneliness, an increase of 25% prior to Covid-19 (University of Edinburgh, 2020); while 39% of young people reported concern regarding their mental wellbeing (Mental Health Foundation, 2020).

This is a clear indication that young people have been, and will continue to be, disproportionately impacted by the long-term societal effects of the pandemic. It is therefore more critical than ever that young people are encouraged and empowered to be active citizens and a part of the solution to the challenges their communities face.

Active citizenship education within Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) provides a vital platform for young people to explore their personal passions and drivers while developing key skills aligned with its four capacities: to create successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors.

Active citizenship

Active citizenship is 'a central feature of learning in social studies that supports young people in developing skills and knowledge to encourage participation in local communities' (Scottish Government, 2020). Citizenship education in Scotland was originally addressed with the addition of Modern Studies to the curriculum in 1962. It was not until 1999 that the concept was revisited as 'citizenship' and since then resources and pedagogy surrounding citizenship education have continued to evolve.

The difference between Scotland's approach to citizenship and other countries is that it is addressed as a 'capacity' rather than a discrete subject (Biesta, 2008). It is embedded within pedagogical

practices and school ethos, enabling a holistic approach for young people to explore beliefs, increase self-awareness, and understand how they can contribute to society.

Many researchers have emphasised the importance of citizenship education being active where students are provided 'experiential learning' (Biesta, 2008) with opportunities to participate in their communities (Biesta, 2008). Kerr and Cleaver (2004) reported that teachers found the 'active' part the most challenging component, but that the provision of high-quality and practical citizenship opportunities creates a strengthened sense of community and belonging, enhanced attachment, empowered youth voice, and platforms for contribution (Ireland et al. 2006). Young Citizens (n.d) agrees that citizenship education supports the development of self-confidence, providing young people with a voice.

Active citizenship education presents young people with an environment to develop critical skills for learning, life, and work. It allows young to explore what drives them, what they feel passionate about, while applying their learning in a real-world context. The most significant learning can come from what takes place following actual experiences, inside and outwith school (Biesta, 2006).

In a study by Volunteer Scotland (2020), 52% of young people said that volunteering had increased their confidence, with 43% benefitting from being a part of a team. Young people who volunteer have found that they have learned new skills (54%), increased their leadership skills (40%), and learned how to overcome challenges (43%). Although volunteering participation is slightly lower in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation Quintiles 1 and 2, the study showed that formal volunteering is relatively well spread across deprivation areas suggesting that citizenship, participation, and volunteering is broadly equitable and accessible to all. (Volunteer Scotland, 2020).

Further, young people exposed to citizenship education are more likely to contribute to society by voting, volunteering, and taking responsibility for their communities. The Scottish Household Survey (2018) stated that 48% of adults in Scotland have volunteered, equating to 2.17 million people, contributing £5.5 billion to the local economy.

It is evident that active citizenship education for young people is an essential part of their school experience. Young people are developing vital skills through such opportunities and it is crucial that collaborative working between schools, partners, and wider communities are embedded in order to provide a rich and vibrant curriculum.

Active citizenship in practice

Before considering the role of the Youth and Philanthropy Initiative (YPI) in Scottish secondary schools, it is important to reflect on the wealth of projects and interventions designed, developed, and implemented to support educational institutions in delivering impactful citizenship education.

There is a great deal of learning to be taken from organisations such as the national Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme which offers young people varied and formative opportunities to learn new skills through volunteering and challenge activities. In England projects such as First Give and Team London Young Ambassadors work in partnership with schools, encouraging young people to take social action and target local grant making. Through Making a Difference students lead their learning whilst developing citizenship and employability skills via real world learning. Building on this, Giving Nation

offers an online professional learning course for practitioners to continue to encourage and empower young people to volunteer.

By understanding the work of peers, The Wood Foundation coordinates a programme of continuous learning and programme development to ensure YPI remains a sector-leading and equitable active citizenship offer. As the largest independent education programme being delivered in Scottish schools, YPI is embedded within learning and teaching, providing a structure for building young people's skills, directly engaging them in their communities, and giving them a voice to campaign on what they care most passionately about.

Youth and Philanthropy Initiative

YPI is a proven and exceptional example of meaningful and embedded active citizenship education, aligned with many of Scotland's national education priorities. The programme has engaged more than 200, 000 young people over the past 12 years and is delivered via a multitude of curricular models. The programme is designed to strongly align with, or complement, school values, culture and ethos. A recent survey showed that 94.4% of teachers agreed that their school values and ethos were more important than ever upon re-opening following Covid-19 (Lundie & Law, 2020).

Throughout the lockdown period it has been argued that young people's voices about their choices, education, community engagement, and passion have been lost (HundrED, 2020). The Wood Foundation recognise that YPI is not, and should not be, a fixed construct but is designed to flex and mould around schools' unique contexts and circumstances.

A key tenet of YPI is equity. Delivered to an entire year group, YPI ensures that all students have the opportunity to develop key skills, engage in their communities, and explore their own beliefs and values. This allows groups that may not traditionally engage in social action vital experiences to explore their potential to be change makers.

"I have seen a massive change in some quieter pupils who have been able to build up confidence and other vital skills without even realising it."

(YPI teacher, 2019)

It is important to highlight the role of YPI in supporting young people in developing skills for learning, life, and work. The top skills reported for 2020 are more human centric than previous years (Van Nuys, 2020) with creativity, persuasion, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence currently the most sought after by employers.

The data from YPI's young people indicates that they are developing these skills throughout their YPI experience. 67% of young people have reported that they have improved their team working skills and 36% stated that they learned from other students' presentations. In addition, 68% of young people agreed that they were better able to empathise by engaging with charities first-hand, gaining a real-life context of the social issues that they campaign for, providing a stronger platform to advocate.

Young people spoke enthusiastically in focus groups about being able to see what was happening in the real world and how their skills and interests could support important change. They shared what

they enjoyed most was the opportunity to lead their own learning. YPI gives independence to young people to campaign for their charities in a way they feel best represents their work, creating an environment for creativity and innovation.

Conclusion

Young people are better informed and more connected than ever before. The potential to be active local and global citizens is more accessible for this generation than any other. There is a vital and pressing role for education to inspire action and provide opportunities to motivate, engage, and empower young people. Amongst a multitude of opportunities, YPI offers young people the space to explore their beliefs and values, lead their own learning, and develop critical skills for learning, life, and work.

Recognising the continued uncertainty created by Covid-19, the role of active citizenship, and opportunities such as YPI, are critical. Young people must be empowered to understand what is happening in their communities and across the globe, while realising their potential to contribute, campaign, and influence change.

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