

# Effective Teaching for Active Citizenship

A systematic evidence review

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In association with

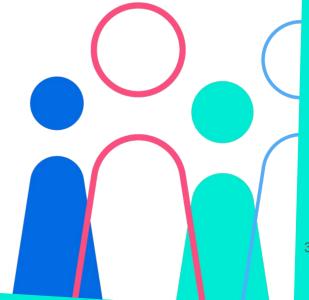
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### Introduction

This summary report has been produced by the Association for Citizenship Teaching and Middlesex University as part of the research and evaluation of the Active Citizenship in Schools programme, that is running from 2021-25. The programme offers a strategic approach to embed social action and active citizenship within the school curriculum. It aims to identify models and practices that ensure pupils engage in and benefit from citizenship education in a sustained and impactful way.

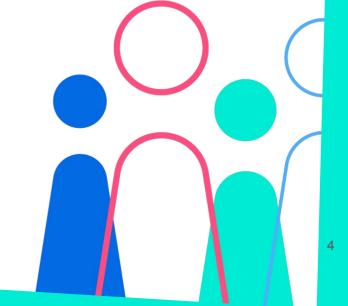
There is also a companion report *The Impact of Citizenship Education:* Review of Evidence for School Leaders aimed at headteachers and governors, and a full technical report available on the ACT website at www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk.

The evidence informing this report has been analysed following a systematic review of research journals. We looked for peer-reviewed academic journal articles which were concerned with evaluating the impact of citizenship education, specifically in relation to active citizenship outcomes. The review included 133 articles from around the world including 18 randomised control trials and large cohort studies, widely thought to be the most reliable form of evidence.

The on-going research and evaluation project includes a student survey, in which any school can participate. This offers you the chance to evaluate the impact of your own provision on a range of citizenship outcomes, including political knowledge, efficacy, trust, tolerance and attitudes towards democracy. Participating schools will receive school-level reports outlining their student responses which can be used as the basis of evidence-informed improvement planning.

Contact ACT if you would like to be involved: info@teachingcitizenship.org.uk





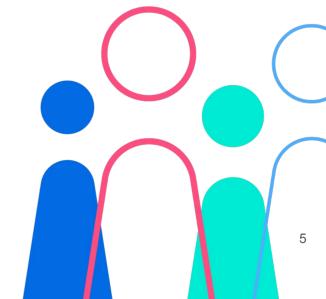
# 1. School context: Teacher-student relationships and school ethos

The quality of teacher-student relationships and student perceptions of their school have an impact on students' citizenship outcomes. When students perceive they have a good relationship with teachers, whom they respect, they are likely to have more positive attitudes towards democracy and to be more likely to participate in a range of activities. Whilst there is evidence to suggest that running a classroom in a democratic style also leads to positive outcomes, this may be undermined when students perceive their school to be unfair, suggesting even good classroom practices may be limited by an unconducive school context.

It is important, therefore, to pay attention to the whole school dimension. Creating the right ethos can lead to students feeling more positively towards the school and increasing their participation in a range of activities. Positive citizenship outcomes may result from schools with lots of opportunities for student participation – even if those activities are not all explicitly related to citizenship action (although sports may be the exception). And there is some evidence to suggest that this institutional effect may yield benefits across the whole school, even improving outcomes for students who do not participate themselves.

One study in our review also suggested that a programme designed to integrate in-school citizenship learning with inter-generational community experience could secure an impact on adult citizenship behaviour. This raises the possibility of the school playing a positive part in promoting citizenship for those in the wider community.





#### **Questions for reflection**

- To what extent does your school ethos align with the aims of citizenship education?
- Do students perceive their relationships with teachers to be good and the school to be fair?
- Do all students have opportunities to engage in a variety of activities, within and beyond the curriculum?

#### **Next steps**

- Read ACT's school case studies to think about how schools achieve these outcomes:
- Priory School and the Bohunt Educational Trust exemplify how to align the Trust ethos with citizenship education.
- Leeds City Academy and Altrincham Girls Grammar School demonstrate how to build highly participative cultures, with lots of varied opportunities for student engagement.
- Review the criteria for the ACT Quality Standard. This includes a framework for self assessment and suggestions to help you to identify priorities in your context.



#### Summary of evidence

Finkel and Ernst (2005), conducted their research with 600 high school students in South Africa. They divided students into three groups for analysis: (i) those who experienced some civics education; (ii) those receiving good civics; (iii) and those receiving none. They found that "when students perceived their teachers to be highly knowledgeable, competent, likeable and inspiring, they appeared to internalize attitudes and values support of democracy... to a greater extent than students who received training from 'poor' instructors or not at all" (Finkel and Ernst, 2005; 358). Wanders et al. (2020), analyzed data from over 10,000 Dutch school students and found a positive relationship between good teacher-student relationship and 'societal involvement' which included positive attitudes towards others and a positive attitude to citizenship participation. In turn, societal involvement led to higher levels of citizenship knowledge. The researchers reported that teacher-student relationships were more significant than relationship between students and their peers, and that the impact was bigger for students whose parents were less educated, or who were first generation migrants. Jagers et al. (2017) studied the effect of a democratic homeroom (equivalent to tutor groups in England) on 515 11-14 year olds in the USA. They used surveys to measure students' evaluations of the extent to which classes were democratic, their views about how equitable the school was, and a range of citizenship outcomes (attitudes, behaviours and beliefs). The strongest positive effects were seen where students perceived their school to be equitable and the homeroom to be democratic. Where one of these factors was missing, the results were lower.

Covell (2010) reports on an evaluation of the Rights, Respect and Responsibility (RRR) programme in Hampshire, which collected data from 1,289 students across 18 schools (six of which were implementing the initiative and 12 were not). The RRR led to improved levels of children feeling they were treated fairly and that the school cared for them and reduced levels of bullying. RRR schools also experienced higher rates of participation in school clubs and activities. Reichert and Print (2018) analysed data from a large-scale Australian survey of 15-16

(2018) analysed data from a large-scale Australian survey of 15-16 year-old students (5,137 in 2010 and 4.074 in 2013) and concluded





that all types of student engagement in clubs and activities were associated with willingness to engage in civic action. Similarly Kahne and Sporte (2008) analyzed data from 4,057 high school students in the USA and found that willingness to engage in civic action was positively associated with student participation in any type of extra-curricular society or activity. They did, however, find that sports activities were an exception, with no positive citizenship outcomes, whilst explicitly focused citizenship activities (such as service learning) were even more strongly associated with positive outcomes.

See et al. (2017) provide an interesting additional angle on the whole school dimension. They conducted a randomized control trial with 7,781 13-14 year-old students to explore the effect of participation in a range of uniformed activities including St. John Ambulance, Sea Cadets, Fire Cadets and Scouts. Each organization taught basic first aid skills as well as skills specific to each service and the programme lasted a year. The authors focused on a range of citizenship outcomes and softer skills, such as teamwork and self-confidence. As well as analyzing data for those who participated directly in an activity, they also considered data for non-participants in schools where the programmes operated, and compared these to students in the control group of schools. The authors conclude that "the results are invariably in favour of the treatment, even just being in the treatment schools (regardless of participation) can have a positive effect" (See et al., 2017: 115). Having said that, the effects are greater for those experiencing more sessions, and are even greater for participating students from more deprived backgrounds, especially in respect of developing empathy, civic-mindedness and happiness.

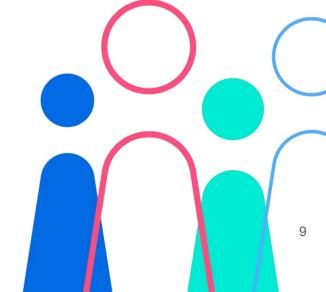
Finally, the suggestion that schools may have impacts in the wider community arises from two evaluations of a large project in the USA, The Kids Voting Programme. The programme included many familiar school-based elements, such as researching candidates and policy areas, holding mock elections and role play, but this was augmented with a parallel voting procedure with ballot boxes in polling stations and 45,000 facilitators to staff the ballot boxes and encourage children to accompany parents to the poll. There are two evaluations exploring whether the school-initiated project had a 'trickle up' impact on parental voter turnout. Both research teams had access to student evaluations, electoral turnout figures in participating districts, and electoral turnout for first time voters in the following election. Linimon and Joslyn (2002) concluded that the project had an overall impact on turnout (it was 2.2% higher in participating areas), and on turnout for first time voters. Simon and Merrill (1998) agree but they also speculate on confounding variables, such as the increased media attention the programme generated in participating areas.



# 2. Planning

Taught provision makes a significant difference to student outcomes in a range of measures. It is well established that citizenship education in the curriculum leads to greater levels of knowledge about citizenship. But, there is mixed evidence about the wider impact in terms of attitudes towards citizenship and intentions to participate. Studies suggest that planned provision should also include active learning experiences to ensure progress in the wider range of citizenship outcomes. The evidence also supports the contention that more citizenship education, lasting to the end of schooling, secures a bigger impact. Fairly predictably, individual projects with a sharp focus on specific aspects of citizenship tend to lead to improvements in those aspects and not others - projects on media lead to improved media skills, experiences of social action lead to improved knowledge of social action, projects about voting often lead to improved voting intentions (i.e. there is no generalised effect). This suggests that a broad and varied programme would be most useful in leading to a broad range of citizenship outcomes.





#### **Questions for reflection**

- Does your taught curriculum provide a coherent set of experiences and content to address all the citizenship outcomes you are aiming for?
- Does the curriculum continue to provide substantial citizenship education throughout key stage 4?
- Do you build skills and experiences as explicitly as you build knowledge?

#### **Next steps**

- Review the criteria for the ACT Quality Standard to identify priorities in your context.
- Check out the curriculum published by ACT to help address any gaps in your provision.



#### Summary of evidence

Feitosa (2020) examined data collected as part of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study, which collected data from 86,914 students from 23 countries in 2016. He focused on outcomes related to students' intentions to vote when they are adults and tests the significance of three aspects of education: (i) experiencing formal citizenship lessons, (ii) participating in school-based activities, and (iii) students' evaluation of 'open classroom climate' (see the section on discussion later in this report). Whilst all three factors are correlated with improved outcomes, Feitosa notes the biggest effect is in relation to having formal citizenship lessons. This supports the conclusion reached by the longitudinal evaluation of the introduction of citizenship education in England (Keating et al, 2010), which identified regular specialist teaching as having a positive impact on a range of citizenship outcomes for students. Keating and Janmaat's (2016) follow up work, with a smaller group of young people after they had left school, demonstrated that experiencing citizenship until year 11 had the biggest impact into adulthood, suggesting that consistency of citizenship education throughout schooling was important. This research also demonstrated that active learning, such as debating and mock elections, were particularly important as part of such provision.

All of this reflects See et al's (2017) point in their evaluation of uniformed activities, that the 'dosage' has an impact, i.e. that the more one experiences a project or programme, the better the impact. Blevins et al (2021) also reported that students who came back to their civics summer camps for multiple years still continued to demonstrate improved outcomes each year, suggesting that more of a similar experience has an additive impact. This would suggest that short-lived one-off projects may have more limited impact overall, especially when they are not typical of students' experiences in school.

There is fairly strong and consistent evidence that citizenship education improves students' citizenship knowledge and understanding. Niemi & Junn (1998) provide the classic account of the impact of citizenship education, based on a nationally representative survey of over 4,000 high school students in the USA. They demonstrated that routine citizenship education with regular class discussions of citizenship topics led to an 11% gain in basic knowledge.



Finkel & Ernst's (2005) study of 600 students in South Africa reported similar gains simply by having timetabled citizenship classes. Zhang et al (2012) analysed data from 2,811 14 year-old students in the USA and concluded that citizenship education helped build basic knowledge which in turn enabled students to achieve higher levels of conceptual thinking about citizenship. However, they found that for many students there was no link between this knowledge and their citizenship skills. This suggests that teachers need to address both aspects explicitly in their planning, rather than assume knowledge would lead to preparedness to participate. Bayram Özdemir et al (2016) analysed survey data from 2,012 Swedish students in grade 7 (12-13 year olds) and grade 10 (15-16 year olds). They concluded that citizenship education lessons were a necessary but not sufficient condition for promoting the political socialization of young people. The additional factors that had significant effects were student perceptions of their teachers (they wanted them to be inspirational and engaging) and their feelings towards the school.

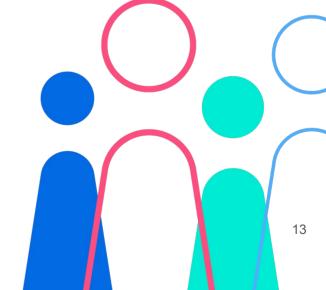
Manning and Edwards (2014) conducted a literature review of the evidence of the impact of citizenship education. Although they found over 6,000 potentially relevant articles they only selected nine for inclusion and concluded that we should also be aware of the different types of active citizenship impact. The evidence they considered suggested it was easier to affect changes in students' intentions to participate in relatively informal citizen action, such as signing petitions, rather than more demanding actions, such as voter registration and voting. Blevins et al (2016, 2018 and 2021) have evaluated civic summer camps over a number of years and demonstrated that the precise focus of a programme determines the kinds of outcomes secured. For example, a narrow focus on social action secures improved knowledge of, and attitudes towards social action, but not voting. Similarly, improved knowledge about social action does not affect underlying worldviews about citizenship.



# 3. Teaching styles

In England there is substantial current interest in forms of direct instruction and knowledge-led teaching and the research evidence suggests that this can be useful in building student knowledge and some citizenship skills. This may be particularly useful where students have little prior citizenship knowledge (for example because their parents have less knowledge to pass on). Direct instruction, however, will not lead to improvements in the wider range of citizenship outcomes for disadvantaged students and seems to be particularly problematic in nurturing students' sense of agency. For most students interactive teaching methods, or at least a blend of direct instruction and active learning, are most impactful. This is the case for the acquisition of knowledge as well as attitudes towards democracy and intended and actual levels of participation. Experiencing a range of fairly familiar school-based activities, such as mock elections, school councils and debating leads to higher levels of political participation into adulthood. When considering what active approaches to use, the evidence indicates that a wide variety of approaches can be effective. There is considerable evidence that projects based on investigating, planning and undertaking social action are particularly useful, but there is also evidence that lots of other activities work, including games, online publishing, and engaging with interactive exhibitions (several of these approaches are considered in the following sections). This strongly suggests that reliance on a narrow range of teacher-led instruction is likely to limit the impact of citizenship education and promotes the idea that a rich and varied range of experiences bring substantial benefits. As ever, there is something to be said for balance here, and there is also some suggestion that students may simply be overwhelmed by too many unfamiliar teaching strategies.





#### **Questions for reflection**

- If you review your schemes of work and list the student activities, what types of activities are most common, and what approaches do you use least?
- Is there a default pattern of teaching, and are there opportunities to widen the variety?
- Are you building in opportunities for students to undertake activities at home (with parents and others) and in the wider community, through exhibitions, galleries and visits?

#### **Next steps**

- ACT's CPD programme includes many workshops on specific aspects of pedagogy. Discuss with your team who might attend which sessions to help diversify your range of learning activities.
- Run focus groups with students in each year group to discuss what kinds of activities work best for them, and which they feel could be improved.



#### Summary of evidence

Finkel and Ernst (2005), in their investigation of the effect of the Democracy for All programme on 600 South African students found that "when students were trained in civics classrooms using interactive and participatory teaching methods they developed political tolerance and trust, as well as important civic skills and supportive participatory attitudes to a greater extent than students who were trained using more traditional pedagogical approaches or who received no civics training whatsoever" (Finkel and Ernst, 2005: 358). This programme trained university students to teach high school students about issues related to democracy, human rights, elections, conflict resolution, and how citizens can participate responsibly in democratic politics, suggesting that participative methods may be effective regardless of the level of teacher qualification. Ballard, Cohen, & Littenberg-Tobias (2016) studied a similar student-led active citizenship project in the USA with 617 students from 26 schools and reported a 14% difference in levels of knowledge between those participating in the project and a control group. Other significant improvements were recorded in civic efficacy. Torney-Purta & Wilkenfeld (2009) analysed data from 2,800 ninth grade students in the USA and concluded that interactive teaching methods or a combination of interactive and lecture-style inputs generally resulted in higher levels of knowledge and related citizenship skills compared to students who predominantly experienced lecture-style teaching. A caveat to this general finding was that students from more deprived backgrounds appeared to benefit from some forms of direct instruction to enhance specific skills such as media literacy, but this was also associated with lower measures of self-efficacy in discussing topical issues. This suggests that a blend of carefully selected approaches might be most beneficial and Campbell (2019) discusses the need for balance in his own review of the evidence for citizenship education. Too much direct instruction seems to limit efficacy but too many unfamiliar activities may lead to lower knowledge. A range of teaching approaches, used routinely, seems to be a reasonable interpretation of these diverse studies. Keating & Janmaat (2016) collected survey data from 746 20 year olds who had previously participated in a school-based evaluation of citizenship education in England. They found that participation in activities such as

school councils, mock elections and debate clubs were



positively correlated with levels of participation into adulthood. They found that participation in activities such as school councils, mock elections and debate clubs were positively correlated with levels of participation into adulthood. Young people reporting high incidence of such activities in year 11 were up to 14% more likely to participate in voting and other forms of citizenship (protesting, petitions etc.) into adulthood, and the impact persisted independent of social class.

Many studies also indicate that a wide variety of learning activities often has significant effects on student outcomes. For example, Vercelloti & Matto's (2015) study with 361 high school students concluded that regular engagement with the news (at school and at home) led to significant improvements in knowledge and interest in researching wider media sources, and that this combination of home/school activities had a bigger impact than simply undertaking regular activities in class. In this study the effect was even greater for those students with less-educated parents. Feddes et al. (2019) conducted pre & post evaluation surveys with 453 Dutch secondary students attending an interactive educational exhibition (Fortress Democracy) and found an 18% improvement in knowledge (specifically related to democracy) as well as improved levels of political trust. Blevins, LeCompte & Wells (2014) studied the impact on 256 students of using an online interactive civics game for 6 weeks and found a moderate effect size of (0.6) with bigger impacts on younger students. Bowyer and Kahne (2020) investigated the effect of digital engagement learning opportunities on 10,254 high school students in Chicago over the course of a year. They found that students who learnt how to create and share digital media related to social issues were more likely to engage in participatory politics as a result, whereas those who were only positioned as critical consumers of media created by others became less likely to participate.

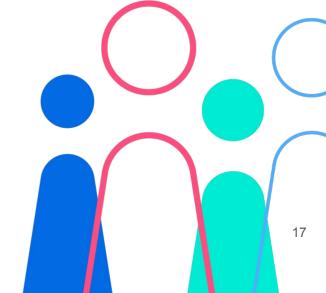


## 4. Discussion and debate

Students' perception of the degree to which their classrooms encourage the expression and exploration of diverse opinions is correlated with improved knowledge, attitudes and experience of active citizenship. A number of small evaluations of specific projects suggest that it is the discussion that makes the difference, as opportunities to discuss work are often linked to higher outcomes than simply learning about the material individually. A range of models for discussion have been shown to be effective, suggesting that it is the quality of discussion that makes the difference, rather than the specific style of activity. Researchers have suggested that high quality talk moves beyond merely exchanging opinions and includes opportunities for critical evaluation and co-construction of new arguments.

We can also draw on a more general literature about classroom talk, from the citizenship curriculum, which suggests traditional bevond teacher-centred discussion can restrict the depth and criticality of student talk. The evidence also demonstrates that it is often unexpectedly difficult to achieve this transition to more sustained student talk. This may reflect teachers' unwillingness to give up control / pace; students' reticence to engage critically with their friends; or uncertainty about the purpose or nature of the task. Several researchers have noted that small group talk can be incomplete or messy, but still yield improvements in reasoning and justification. They suggest that such activities are helpful for students who participate in the dialogue and those who simply listen, because it models thinking in action.





#### **Questions for reflection**

- Does your school offer routine opportunities for students to engage in sustained discussion?
- How do you encourage students to develop their discussion skills, in particular, the capacity to engage in constructive dialogue?
- How do you support colleagues, especially non-specialists, to develop skills for facilitating effective classroom discussion (including both teacher-student and student-student discussion)?
- How do you encourage critical evaluation and co-construction of ideas between students to model advanced political reasoning?

#### **Next steps**

- The Deliberative Classroom resources include a variety of strategies to promote student-student talk. Review where explicit opportunities for discussion, debate and deliberation are included in your schemes of work, and ensure there is some clear progression planned across the curriculum.
- The Deliberative Classroom also features a classroom observation schedule to consider the whole class, rather than focus on individual contributions. This will help to structure peer observations between colleagues to support them to make the transition to sustained student-student talk.



#### Summary of evidence

The ICCS international survey is a large-scale international project that generates a data set of tens of thousands of school students (around 14 years of age) on a fairly regular basis. This includes a widely used measure of 'open classroom climate' (OCC) which includes the following criteria, which students respond to on a 4-point scale:

- Students feel free to disagree openly with their teachers about political and social issues during class.
- Students are encouraged to make up their own minds about issues.
- Teachers respect students' opinions and encourage them to express them during class.
- Students feel free to express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from most other students.
- Teachers encourage students to discuss political or social issues about which people have differing opinions.
- Teachers present several sides of an issue when explaining it to a class.

Several studies have analysed the ICCS data and noted that high ratings of OCC are generally correlated with a number of other factors, for example, 'critical consciousness' (Godfrey and Grayman, 2014), civic knowledge (Lin, 2014), political participation (Hoskins, Janmaat and Melis, 2017), good teacher-students relationships and positive student perceptions of school (Maurissen, Claes and Barber, 2018). As we said at the outset, good teacher-student relationships underpin effective citizenship education, however, it is also possible that promoting OCC serves to enhance those relationships, so there may well be a mutually reinforcing process at work. We should also be aware that students' evaluations of OCC are often quite different within the same class, so their perception of OCC may also reflect their pre-existing attitude towards their relationship with their teachers (Campbell, 2019).

Whilst the survey data alone is stronger for demonstrating consistent correlations than causal mechanisms, a number of more specific evaluations strongly suggest that the adoption of talking strategies helps to cause those other positive outcomes. Andolina and Conklin (2018), investigated the effect of Project Soapbox on 204 high school students from 9 public Chicago schools. The project is a brief



(1-2 week programme) in which students write and deliver a speech about a community issue of importance to them. It aims to cultivate both democratic and literacy skills among young people. The authors found that participation in this very short project yielded small gains in students' expectations for future civic engagement and they expressed greater confidence in their rhetorical skills. Additionally, although this curriculum is designed to emphasize rhetorical skills and democratic orientations, some of the strongest impacts appeared in students' reports of their listening and empathy skills. Levy (2017), investigated the effect that participation in Model United Nations (MUN) club activities had on 61 students at a midwestern high school over one academic year. Levy found that students' political efficacy increased more than a comparison group who undertook 20 hours of independent community service per academic year but with no interactive political learning. Vercellotti and Matto (2016) studied 361 students engaging regularly with news sources and concluded that those who discussed their news stories had much better outcomes than those who simply read news stories themselves on a regular basis. Schuitema et al. (2009) undertook research with 482 Dutch students to assess the impact of dialogic teaching, which was enacted through groupwork. They assessed the quality of an essay for students who undertook tasks in groups and those who worked individually. They concluded that dialogic teaching is linked to better justifications for one's argument and that groupwork works as a method for dialogic teaching, which they define as having three characteristics: (i) students should exchange views, (ii) they should engage with one another to co-construct ideas, and (iii) engage in some form of evaluation of suggestions.

ACT's own small qualitative research project into the Deliberative Classroom resources indicated that students could use opportunities for classroom discussion to explore and deepen their accounts of controversial issues. It found that small group discussion could be fairly truncated, but often led to more elaborate responses in whole class discussions (Jerome, Liddle and Young 2021a). However, it also raised some challenges, in that students do not always connect with prior learning, they may avoid evaluating responses if working with friends, and may terminate conversations early because of established expectations about how long or difficult a task should be (Jerome, Liddle and Young, 2021b). This reflects Bickmore and Parker's (2014) qualitative research which found that even when social studies teachers are deliberately trying to create sustained dialogue between students, the lessons often fail to achieve this.



Much of the research into the role of talk and discussion in schools has been conducted in subjects other than citizenship, particularly science and English (Howe and Abedin, 2013). This suggests that a clear distinction is to move beyond I-R-E patterns (where teachers initiate talk, students respond, and the teacher evaluates their contribution) and to work towards opportunities for sustained student-student talk. The wider evidence suggests that where this is achieved, there are learning benefits for all students, regardless of their own contribution to discussion. This is likely to be because the discussion itself demonstrates critical thinking in action and acts as a model for students who do not speak as much in class (Howe, 2017). Brice (2002) has called this 'rough draft talk' in which ideas can be refined and deepened and Mercer and Dawes (2014) describe it as 'thinking aloud'.



# 5. Active Citizenship

Active citizenship works in securing a range of valuable outcomes but the type and content of experiences can impact significantly on the outcomes. We might describe a complete active citizenship project as one with the following stages:

Identify issue Research issue Discuss options	Plan action	Implement action
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But some projects seem to focus only on some of these stages, for example, volunteering or service learning, where the students are merely recruited into pre-existing programmes might look like this:

		Implement
		action

Whilst projects which happen in short time frames, or off-site, might look more like this:

|--|

Interestingly, the research evidence suggests that all of these models are likely to yield some success, but they also highlight that projects tend to tackle specific issues and therefore lead to outcomes related to their focus. For example, a project focused on planning social action on a local problem may well have no impact on general attitudes towards, or knowledge about, voting as a form of active citizenship. This strongly suggests that a combination of active citizenship learning opportunities would be required to secure wide-ranging impacts on attitudes, knowledge and behaviour. And where this is evident, it does appear to lead to such outcomes.

In addition researchers have differentiated between the content of active citizenship projects, as well as the process and frequency / duration. In one study students who focused on safety issues (related to bullying, conflict resolution, or safe journeys home)



tended to experience better outcomes because they were more likely to feel strongly about their issue and feel they could do something about it. This does not exclude other projects from being effective but, when dealing with broader social issues, students were easily put off by a lack of access to decision makers, so teachers might need to provide finely balanced advice and scaffolding to ensure all students work on engaging and achievable projects. The balance comes from providing guidance whilst allowing free choice, as studies into volunteering suggest strongly that coercing students into volunteering undermines long term effects.



#### **Questions for reflection**

- What do you want your students to know about, be able to do, and think about active citizenship?
- How does your curriculum address each of these aims?
   How are specific projects / schemes of work framed in terms of forms of action and types of learning outcome?
- How do you guide students towards achievable projects and what criteria are you using to assess 'achievability' (explicitly stated and implicit in your own judgement)?

#### **Next steps**

- In terms of planning and facilitating a complete active citizenship cycle, look at ACT's Active Citizenship programme for guidance and resources.
- In terms of shorter, more focused opportunities for active citizenship, look at ACT's model curriculum for examples of units.
- Read the case study of Priory school for examples of how to teach about active citizens.
- Read the case studies of Leeds City Academy and Altrincham Grammar School for Girls for ideas about how to build multiple opportunities for participation across the school.



#### Summary of evidence

A number of studies demonstrate that active citizenship pedagogies have a variety of positive impacts. Typically such pedagogic approaches involve opportunities for researching, planning and undertaking some kind of activity, often a civics project / campaign. However, some projects include only part of this full cycle of action, for example, researching and planning action but not implementing it, or being coopted into action (through volunteering or service learning) without full involvement in research and planning. Nevertheless, many of these kinds of projects lead to outcomes such as improvements in students' sense of civic responsibility and motivation to act, although some projects observe this is more pronounced in relation to local / neighbourhood contexts (Dallago et al, 2009; Lee et al 2019), whereas others observe impacts on voting behaviours (Ballard et al, 2016). Participation also leads to other personal effects, for example, improved attitudes towards oneself and others (Dumutriu and Dumitru, 2014), increased institutional trust, and improved self-reported wellbeing (Prati et al, 2020).

Whilst the evidence of impact looks impressive, it is worth noting that evaluations often set out to measure a range of indicators, all of which relate to perfectly reasonable expectations from the intervention, but many studies report measurable change only on some of these indicators. This suggests that, whilst it is easy to construct coherent models of impact akin to a 'theory of change', the evidence does not always support such neat models. There are two general observations to make before we consider these studies in greater detail. First, the issue of 'dosage' emerges in several studies as being significant. Some projects are rather short-lived and therefore it might not be surprising that comprehensive change is not secured from a single experience over a few weeks or a term (Dallago, et al, 2009). Positive outcomes into adulthood are often associated with a longer duration of school activities (Gardner et al, 2008). Second, some researchers measure a wide range of civic outcomes for quite sharply focused interventions. For example, Ballard et al (2016) evaluate a social action project which demonstrates impact on knowledge and

efficacy but not civic commitment. Similarly Blevins et al (2021) ran civics summer camps around specific actions for social action,



and observed improved levels of knowledge around social action, but no change to underlying worldviews related to citizenship. This helps to set the scene for some of the variations in the projects described below – they often measure change in relation to the specific focus of the project, but not in the broader range of civic outcomes, and some are relatively short projects of variable intensity. This cautions against being overly optimistic that a few well-designed active citizenship projects can achieve all the desirable citizenship outcomes. The evidence suggests more pragmatically that specific projects promote specific outcomes, but it also identifies some design aspects we might bear in mind.

We start by considering a project that bears some similarity to the active citizenship projects undertaken as part of the GCSE Citizenship Studies in England. Ballard et al. (2016) investigated the effect of Generation Citizen on middle and high school students in the US. They describe the project as an 'action civics process' in which students choose a local issue to tackle collectively, learn strategies and skills for taking action, and develop and implement an action plan accordingly. The study included 617 students and the project lasted one semester, with two sessions per week facilitated by college students. It generated bigger impacts in civic efficacy and action civics knowledge and a smaller impact in local political knowledge and general civic commitment. Perhaps most usefully, the researchers explored three factors that might be expected to influence the impact of the project:

- Context: the research distinguished between proximal (in-school) or distal (out of school) issues. They speculated that issues closer to home might be more likely to lead to successful outcomes, but they found this made no difference.
- Content: the research also distinguished between projects dealing with issues related to safety, and others such as the school environment and broader social issues. Examples of what were considered 'safety' issues included bullying, theft on campus, conflict mediation, lack of information about safety concerns, safety in community parks and safety on public transportation. They found that projects relating to safety had the most positive impact, possibly because they generate a more immediate motivation for students and seem like addressable issues.
- Contact with decision-makers: the researchers concluded it was better to undertake projects where students had easy access to decision-makers (which had a positive impact on knowledge and efficacy) rather than where access would be difficult (which often led to frustration).



This strongly suggests that the same project process can lead to very different outcomes and that teachers should pay attention both to what the students want to address and the mechanism by which they aim to address it. Ballard et al speculate that the most impactful projects were perceived as important and addressable, and that because they often dealt with the behaviour of peers, seemed more independent of adults. That said, they also suggest that where students want to deal with broader social issues, teachers should spend time working with them on how to access appropriate decision makers.

Two Italian projects seem to demonstrate the limitations of projects which do not fully embrace citizenship action, even though they generated some positive results. Dallago et al. (2010), investigated the effect of The Adolescents, Life Context, and School project on 12-year-olds at a school in Italy. During the 3-month programme 132 students observed, documented, and talked about their own life contexts in order to "voice problems to decision makers." The researchers collected data on four civic outcomes: self-efficacy, empowerment, civic responsibility, and neighborhood attachment but the project only affected the last two. Prati et al. (2020) investigated the effect of Youth-Led Participatory Action and Research on students in an Italian high school and worked with 35 students over two years, and also collected data from 34 students in a control group. The project focused on conducting research into social issues of interest to students and presenting the findings to others and suggesting actions that could be taken by EU institutions. The results showed that participants in the intervention group reported increased scores on social well-being, institutional trust, and participation and decreased scores on political alienation compared with the control group. There was no impact on students' feelings toward the EU or EU citizenship and the researchers speculate this was because the concept of EU citizenship had not really been taught. These projects reinforce the idea that the precise design and content of a project leads to rather precise outcomes.

Blevins et al. (2021) investigated the effect of the iEngage Summer Civics Institute on 10-14 year olds in a summer camp. The programme is an out-of-school action civics programme that seeks to develop young people's civic and political competence and strengthen their community and political engagement through inquiry-based civics projects in the which they research and present their ideas about action on local community issues. They collected data from 456 individuals over the course of six years. The authors found that the programme had an effect on all four constructs measured: civic competence, community engagement, political



competence and political activism and the impacts tended to be bigger for younger participants. The researchers also note that, whilst teaching people about forms of activism led to improvements in their knowledge about how to act as citizens, it did not affect their overall view of citizenship (their broader worldview as reflected in Westheimer & Kahne's typology: personally responsible, participatory, and justice oriented citizens). This indicates the potential of relatively short-lived but intense projects to have an impact, but suggests broader attitudinal change is unaffected by such activities. We note here that the projects were limited in relation to actually implementing plans for action precisely by the summer camp setting, and so this is more a research, discussion and planning project than a full active citizenship project.

Three US studies also suggest some useful insights in relation to volunteering. Lin's (2015) literature review concludes that service learning, akin to a form of volunteering, can lead to improved civic engagement. However, this finding is qualified by Kim and Morgül's (2017) large longitudinal study of 15,701 young people (11-18 years of age) which concluded that those who participated in youth volunteering were more likely to volunteer as adults, but this did not apply when youth volunteering was forced rather than optional. They also confirmed that voluntary volunteering is positively correlated with psychological well-being, but forced voluntary activity is not. Hill and Dulk (2013) analysed longitudinal data from over 3,000 students in different types of school and concluded that students who went to Protestant schools were more likely to continue volunteering into adulthood, and to report that most of their volunteering opportunities arose through their church. They speculate that this pattern may be established through habituation rather than coercion.

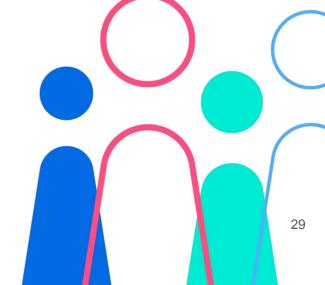
Finally, a few articles focused on aspects of student voice. We have already mentioned Keating and Janmaat's (2016) study which combined participation of school councils, mock elections and debating clubs into a single measure of 'active citizenship learning' and found this positively correlated with political participation into adulthood. A small-scale qualitative study by Jarkiewicz (2020) found that students participating in a youth forum reported improvements in efficacy and attitude towards civic matters. However, Thornberg's (2010) more critical qualitative study of 'school democratic meetings' in Swedish primary schools found a form of ritualistic or performative participation masked a combination of naivety and cynicism, which prevented such fora from being useful sites for citizenship education for many.



# 6. Simulations

The small sample of research we found here dealt with simulations of political processes and participation in games, now often computer games. The evidence-base is weaker here but research generally finds positive outcomes in terms of knowledge, attitudes and skills. Several studies note that the requirement to apply knowledge in simulations helps to deepen understanding. The evaluations suggest a number of design issues that should be considered. First, whilst classroom simulations generally work, their effect may be even greater if they connect to opportunities for real-life engagement, for example, by producing media products for others or engaging with external speakers. In some ways such simulations mirror the truncated forms of active citizenship described in the previous section. Second, because simulations offer students a safe space to experiment with undesirable decisions, the simulation should make such options legitimate. This ensures students 'try out' a range of approaches as all such experiences are likely to be educationally useful. Third, it might be useful to change roles part way through longer simulations to avoid students over-identifying with one perspective, especially as one study suggests students role-playing powerful characters might end up with a more developed sense of how the political system works, whilst those occupying relatively powerless positions can end up feeling the system is ineffective. Finally, there is general consensus that de-briefing at the end is important, especially to learn from the different perspectives and experiences in the simulation.





#### **Questions for reflection**

- When do you use simulations and what are the precise learning intentions?
- Do you use simulations of different durations (within a single lesson and spanning several lessons)?
- How do simulations connect to broader schemes of work, to ensure they are not separate stand-alone experiences?
- Is there scope to introduce more simulations, to extend prior learning and deepen students' understanding of core concepts and processes?

#### **Next steps**

- A good starting point for inspiration for traditional classroom resources is www.collaborativelearning.org
- UK Parliament also offers an on-line game 'MP for a week' https://learning.parliament.uk/en/resources/mp-for-a-week/
- Read the case study of Leeds City Academy for ideas about how to build student participation around a model of government.



#### Summary of evidence

Lin's (2015) review of existing evidence suggested that role plays were useful for rehearsing some of the early stages of active citizenship projects – researching, discussing and devising strategies for action. Those focused on mock elections, including opportunities to listen to hustings, compare manifestos etc. also introduce useful knowledge about formal citizenship. Lin's conclusion that simulations tend to demonstrate moderate success, is supported by Bennion and Laughlin's (2018) later review of material published in the Journal of Political Science Education. They found that simulations where students model the process of parliamentary debates or enquiries leads to improved knowledge and interest in politics (Marianni and Glenn, 2014) as well as the development of skills related to critical investigation (Bernstein, 2008). Lin added a caveat, and noted that the outcomes were often better when programmes also include opportunities for communicating with people beyond the class – publishing media outputs to a wider audience or talking to external experts / candidates.

Our review found only a few studies dealing with specific evaluations of simulations and these were all relatively small in scale. Chee et al. (2013), investigated the game-based civics learning programme, Statecraft X, on high school students in Singapore. The Statecraft X curriculum extended over three weeks, including two one-hour classroom sessions and game play at home during certain hours. Learning outcomes were evaluated on the basis of a summative essay-writing task using a rubric consisting of four criteria: multiple viewpoints, proposed solutions, disposition of active citizen, and persuasiveness. The study sample is small (82 students) and the study duration is short in length (three weeks), but the authors concluded that "the students using the Statecraft X game complemented by dialogic pedagogy outperformed a comparable control class in a summative essay writing task" (Chee et al., 2013: 25). Arphattananon (2021) conducted a small qualitative evaluation of role play in social studies classrooms in Thailand for 10-12 year olds and argued it had helped improve students' attitudes towards diversity and multiculturalism. Levy's (2018) evaluation of high-school students' participation in Model UN activities led to improvements in political efficacy greater than students who engaged in service learning / voluntary projects.



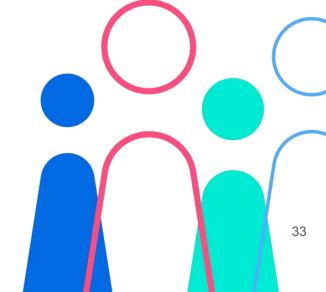
There is a small literature on simulations in political education that reinforces these positive findings, although Baranowski and Weir's (2015) review points out that the research is very often small-scale practitioner write-ups. Examples of more rigorous evaluations include Meya and Eisenack (2018) who evaluated a climate change game with 200 13-16 year old students in Germany. The game gave students the opportunity to make decisions which contributed to climate change or reduced it, and the evaluation data showed that all students benefitted equally from the game regardless of the in-game decisions they made. They argue that one important benefit of such simulations is that they create a safe space for students to try out solutions and learn from their success or failure. They conclude that such games should include desirable and undesirable options and positively seek to tempt students to make undesirable choices. Because learning takes place from either set of choices, they also suggest it should be possible for students to win the game by making either set of choices. Baranowski and Weir (2010) report findings from undergraduate teaching, however, they offer an observation that may be useful for school teachers – that those students occupying the role of powerful actors gained a better understanding of political processes than those role-playing relatively powerless characters. They suggest it is important to ensure all students gain experience of different roles to prevent this. Meya and Eisenack also emphasise the importance of a collective de-brief after the game, so students can learn from each others' decisions and experiences.



# 7. Diversity and equality

There is a 'civic gap' which mirrors the general attainment gap between children eligible for free schools meals and their better off peers. This class divide is also complicated by a gender gap (in which girls reports better results from citizenship education than boys) and variations according to age (with younger students reporting more benefits than older ones) and differences according to migration experience (with migrant children having more positive attitudes towards political participation than others of comparable socio-economic status). The civic gap widens and becomes harder through adolescence, which provides a particular challenge for secondary schools. In part this civic gap reflects the broader differences in cultural capital, but there is evidence that citizenship education can have some compensatory impact, especially if teachers build positive relationships with students, sequence lessons carefully so they provide enough information to enable deprived students to engage, and encourage them to participate in discussions and active citizenship projects. The problem seems to be related to access and engagement with such opportunities, as poorer students may be offered fewer opportunities because of school type or in-school streaming; or they may simply be less likely than their middle-class peers to take up the opportunities. In order to disrupt this cycle of reproducing inequalities, schools need to build strong relationships early and ensure students engage in opportunities which motivate them.





#### **Questions for reflection**

- What are the patterns of inequality in citizenship in your school? This may involve analysis of outcomes, participation rates and student evaluations.
- Are there systems in place to monitor students' participation in extra-curricular activities, including clubs and societies, student voice, academic roles?
- How does the school ensure early key stage 3 lessons maximise student engagement and motivation?

#### **Next steps**

- Review your year 7 and 8 curriculum to ensure you maximise engagement and motivation. Check out ACT's schemes of work for inspiration.
- Use ACT's student survey to generate data on student attitudes to measure your progress.



#### Summary of evidence

Almost half of the articles in the literature review dealt with differences between social groups, either as a main focus or through comparisons between different groups in the data analysis phase, and almost half of these were from the USA. We have mentioned some of the findings in the previous sections where applicable, but here we summarise some of the main observations to emerge from this sub-set of the evidence.

The first observation to make is to remind ourselves that there is a rich diversity of diversities, in other words, studies dealt with socio-economic status (which is often discussed in relation to a 'civic gap'), but also migration status, ethnicity, gender, language, religion, age, disability, access to technology etc. All of these factors require an intersectional awareness when working with specific groups of students, but each publication we reviewed tends to focus on one or two of these dimensions, and occasionally discusses how two or more dimensions interrelate. This very brief summary may serve simply to alert practitioners to some patterns of inequality that could be relevant to their own context, but how these differences interact in practice will depend on context.

The civic gap refers to the gap in political knowledge, interest and participation between students of higher and lower socio-economic status, which mirrors the general attainment gap between students in receipt of free school meals and those who are not. This is well documented and is reflected in voter turnout figures for 2017 which showed 35% of young unemployed and semi-skilled workers voted, when the overall turnout was 63%. The strength of the relationship between social class and voting intentions increases as students progress through secondary school in the UK, meaning that the civic gap widens during adolescence (Hoskins and Janmaat, 2019). The gap, in part, reflects the cultural capital gap, as middle-class parents are generally educated to a higher level, are more likely to vote themselves, and more likely to engage their children in discussions of contemporary social issues and accompany them to museums and galleries (Hoskins et al, 2017). Galais (2018), working in Canada, found that "the strongest effect observed... is the one exerted by familial status" and Kahne and Sporte (2008)



found that in the USA "neighbourhood and family context were strongly related to students' commitments to civic participation," (Kahne and Sporte, 2008: 17). They also found that "classroom civic learning opportunities can more than offset the impact of neighborhood or home contexts that are relatively inattentive to civic and political issues when it comes to the development of commitments to civic participation" (Kahne and Sporte, 2008: 19). Because relatively deprived young people tend not to receive these advantages from home (or experience them less). it does mean that schools may be well placed to have a significant compensatory effect, by introducing young people to knowledge and experiences they do not encounter at home or in their local community. There is good evidence that many aspects of citizenship education, for example, open classroom climate and active citizenship, have a bigger impact on relatively deprived young people (Hoskins et al, 2017; Godfrey and Grayman, 2014; Maurissen et al, 2018; Rutkowski et al, 2014; See et al, 2017). However, the problem seems to relate to access, as poorer students tend to access these opportunities less frequently (Hoskins et al, 2017). This may be because their lower level of prior interest leads them to overlook opportunities on offer; but it may also be the result of differential access through in-school streaming and setting; and it may also be the result of middle-class children simply stepping forward to take up the opportunities first. The evidence suggests therefore that ensuring poorer students take up these opportunities could narrow the civic gap.

The difference between offering opportunities and ensuring young people take them up is an important one here. When encouraging poorer students to participate in active citizenship projects, it is important to remember that forced volunteering has a much smaller and shorter-lived impact than freely chosen volunteering (Kim and Morgül, 2017) and simply going through the motions without sufficient engagement will severely reduce the impact of active citizenship experiences (Ballard et al, 2016). It is also important to note that underpinning the success of these pedagogic strategies is the importance of positive teacher-student relationships (Wanders et al, 2020). Other studies have shown that younger students (age 12) tend to experience the biggest impacts from active citizenship projects, whilst it is much more difficult to affect change by the end of secondary education (Blevins et al, 2014; Wanders et al, 2020). Torney-Purta & Wilkenfeld (2009) also offer an additional point to consider, which is that students from more deprived backgrounds may actually need some direct teaching of information before they can benefit from opportunities to participate in open discussion. If general knowledge of contemporary



issues is another element of cultural capital, then teachers may need to sequence these teaching strategies carefully, to ensure that they work and do not further alienate poorer students from citizenship education.

As with the broader educational attainment gap, this class gap is complicated by a gender gap and variations related to ethnicity and migration status. Girls tend to report greater impacts from participation in citizenship education (Andolina and Conklin, 2018; Blevins et al, 2021; Činčera et al, 2018). And relatively poor migrant students often differ from others in the same socio-economic circumstances by having more interest in social and political issues and a greater propensity to participate in their local communities. However, this difference may reduce with second and third generations in migrant families. A study including over 8,000 young people in the USA found that formal citizenship education had a particularly positive effect on migrant students because it addressed a knowledge deficit for relatively newly arrived families (Callahan et al, 2008).



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