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Pupil and Teacher Perceptions of Community Action: An English Context.

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Background

In England over the last two decades**,** there has been a growing interest in the role of English schools in developing, facilitating and supporting young people's community participation. A number of policy initiatives have sought to build the capacity and opportunities for youth participation. Research suggests, however, that pupils and schools are often prohibited by significant barriers from becoming involved with community activities, particularly those which might occur beyond the school environment itself. In March 2010 the UK Labour government launched a Youth Community Action initiative for England, piloted across five local authorities, which aimed to involve young people of 14-16 years-of-age in community action. Following the UK general election in May 2010**,** the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government terminated these pilots but was quick to announce the launch and piloting of a National Citizen Service for 16-19 year olds in England.

Purpose

Drawing on research conducted with participants in one Youth Community Action pilot project, the aim of this study was to explore the perceptions and understandings of young people regarding their involvement in community action activities and how this compared to the perceptions and understandings of the teachers responsible for co-ordinating such activities.

Sample

In the final synthesis, the sample comprised 614 pupil questionnaires, representing a response rate of 24 percent of the pupils in the 9 participating schools. 11 semi-structured interviews and one focus group interview were conducted with pupils in 6 of the schools, with a further 8 semi-structured interviews conducted with teachers in these 6 schools.

Design and methods

A questionnaire was administered to pupils participating in the Youth Community Action pilot, enabling an exploration of self-reported behavioural attitudes and perceptions. The data collected was analysed thematically, with an identification of common themes in responses. In addition, factor analysis and a series of Chi^2 tests of association were carried out. The use of semi-structured interviews, the data from which were analysed thematically, enabled a qualitative exploration of pupils' and teachers' self-reported perceptions of community action activities.

Results

The findings of our questionnaires report that those pupils who know more about their local neighbourhood and community are likely to report greater levels of concern for what happens within it. This suggests that pupils' learning about their neighbourhoods and community is likely to be beneficial toward developing affective attachments to them. For the pupils in our data-set, simply possessing pro-social behaviours and attitudes was not a sufficient or necessary condition for their community awareness and involvement. It suggests that, at least for a notable number of pupils, active engagement in the community requires cultivation and learning beyond pro-social behaviours. The semi-structured interviews report that pupils identify the school as the key source of information about community engagement opportunities, but also indicate that there is a marked difference in the activities which teachers identify their pupils as having undertaken, and the ability of pupils to vocalise these themselves. A further notable finding was a focus on the practical (time, distance, age-constraints) and social (peer-pressure) barriers to community action activities to the exclusion of specifically educational (lack of understanding and skills) barriers.

Conclusions

Results from this study suggest that schools represent an important source for pupils' community involvement, but that in our sample pupils often lack the vocabulary with which to explain the extent and nature of such engagement. Pupils and teachers identify a range of barriers to and benefits of community involvement, but these do not include a lack of understanding or skills. The research raises important questions in the context of recent policy trends in England.

Keywords: Youth Community Action, participation in the community, National Citizen Service

Introduction

In common with many Westernised democratic nations, there has, in recent years, been a renewal of interest within the United Kingdom in educational programmes aimed at engaging young people in service-based community activities. In England (educational policy for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are devolved to regional parliaments and assemblies), a central aspect of the educational policy of successive Labour governments between 1997 and 2010 was an attempt to create greater connections between schools and their communities. This focus was evident in initiatives such as Every Child Matters, Extended Schools and Community Cohesion, reflecting a commitment to recognise the civic role of schooling and, as a particular aspect of this, the community involvement of pupils (QCA, 1998). The first revision of the National Curriculum for England under the Labour government (published in 1999 and taught from 2002) included an aim for schools to educate pupils 'to be responsible and caring citizens capable of contributing to the development of a just society' and for pupils to 'develop their ability to relate to others and work for the common good' (DfEE/QCA, 1999: 11). Further revisions made to the National Curriculum in 2007 (for teaching from 2008) consolidated the recognition that alongside personal enlightenment and preparation for the workplace, schools should seek to develop 'responsible citizens' who are engaged in their local communities and 'make a positive contribution to society' (QCDA, 2007). The 1999 National Curriculum introduced, for the first time, the statutory requirement that pupils in the 11-16 age group attending English state schools should be taught Citizenship education as a foundation subject. Central to Citizenship education is the principle of 'taking informed and responsible action' (QCDA, 2007) within one's community – commonly referred to as 'community involvement' or 'active citizenship' (QCA, 1998).

Policy Background

In an attempt to further cement the expectation that young people can usefully benefit from experiential learning through involvement in community settings, in 2010 the Labour government launched the Youth Community Action (YCA) initiative. This aimed at encouraging young people in England between the ages of 14 and 19 to undertake at least 50 hours of community action by the age of 19, and was directly derived from the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown's 'ambition to create a country in which there is a clear expectation that all young people will undertake service to their community and where community service will become a normal part of growing up' (Cabinet Office Press Statements, 24th April 2009).

Although the YCA pilots were cancelled in July 2010 by the newly formed Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government following the General Election in May, later that month a new National Citizen Service (NCS) for England was launched. Combining physical challenges with social action projects, the NCS aims to 'teach them [young people] what it means to be socially responsible', to 'inspire a generation of young people to appreciate what they can achieve' and to 'allow a whole generation of young people to make a difference in their local area and play an active role in making society a better place' (David Cameron, 2010). Initially realised as a pilot phase involving 12 provider groups and more then 11,000 16-year-olds, the government's intention is to offer the opportunity to be involved in the programme to all 16-year-olds.

Accompanying this policy emphasis on the engagement of young people has been a growing body of small- and large-scale research and evaluation literature focused on young people's community involvement (see for example Benton *et al*, 2008; Pye *et* al, 2009; Keating *et al*, 2010; Mason, *et al*, 2010). Current research presents a mixed picture of young people's involvement within their communities, particularly with regard to the relationships between such engagement and education and schooling. Recent studies by Arthur *et al*, (2009), Mason *et al*, (2010), and Keating, *et al* (2010) all point to the fact that whilst a significant minority of young people between the ages of 14 and 16 are engaged in some form of community involvement, for many this is not a feature of their education or wider lives. In their study into the civic engagement of young people living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, Mason, *et al* (2009: 12) report that, when asked, young people viewed 'school [as] an important site where [they] can be civically engaged… yet more than half of respondents did not report volunteering or helping others at school'. This suggests that young peoples' experience of community involvement activities within schools is somewhat piecemeal. Whilst for some the experience may be positive, for others it may not occur at all (cf. Arthur *et al*, 2009). Moreover, there appears to be something of a gap between the potential of schools for developing and supporting community engagement, and the practical reality of bringing this about in a universal way. Indeed, according to the final report of the ten year (2001-2011) *Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study* (CELS) undertaken in England ~~by the~~ whilst some schools make 'great efforts', the report's case study visits 'suggested that many schools struggle to facilitate participation outside of school and to forge links with local communities' (Keating *et al*, 2010: 56).

Tensions: how should the community involvement of young people be conceptualised?

A brief comparison between the discontinued Youth Community Action (YCA) scheme and its replacement, the National Citizen Service (NCS), highlights three central tensions in terms of how effective provision should be defined. First, there is the question of age of participation. Whereas the YCA scheme was aimed primarily at the engagement of 14-19 year olds, the NCS concentrates instead on students solely of 16 years-of-age. This shift is not insignificant. According to research undertaken on behalf of the national youth volunteering service, 'v' (www.vinspired.com), the 'targeting of young people at particular life stages' is important in securing engagement in and commitment to volunteering within community organisations (Pye *et al*, 2009: 7).

Second, there is the question of the role of the educational setting. Schools, colleges, and training institutions, and indeed Local Authorities, were central to the operation and delivery of the YCA pilots. Government-funded community action advisors and a tailored website, operated through the v-schools organisation, were provided to support schools in developing community action projects. In addition, the Labour government funded five local authority pilot projects to test and trial different approaches to encouraging 14-16 year olds to 'make a difference in their communities' (DCSF, 2010: 4). In contrast, of the 12 groups which have been commissioned to operate the NCS pilots, all come from the community partners sector, and it is not clear what role, if any, schools and colleges might play in these other than to advertise their availability. Moreover, the activities and experiences in which young people will participate through the NCS are scheduled to occur during the standard school vacation period. The requisite role of schools in developing and supporting pupils' community involvement is important when we remember that what 'may appear to be a lack of interest in volunteering among large sections of youth may to some degree reflect a lack of knowledge of what it could involve' (Pye *et al*, 2009: 9). In other words, ~~that~~ young people may not be self-motivated to volunteer, but might if asked and encouraged.

Thirdly, there is the tension between compulsion and voluntary involvement: should government legislate for compulsory community involvement and volunteering of young people? Although some evidence suggests that young people are more likely to support the idea of a compulsory community involvement programme than not (Pye *et al*, 2009), other

research raise concerns with such an idea and the illogicality of any "compulsory volunteering" scheme (see for example University of Strathclyde, 2009). Although in its pilot form the YCA initiative stopped short of making 50 hours of community action compulsory for all 14-16 year olds, it did hold the strong expectation that all pupils should be involved in evidencing such levels of participation. In contrast, and in part resulting from its inclusion in a currently non-compulsory stage of education, participation in the NCS is encouraged by government, but remains optional.

The age of engagement, the role of schools~~,~~ and the extent to which service to the community should be compulsory are not the only noteworthy questions relating to the community involvement of young people. There remains a great deal of definitional complexity about precisely what "responsible action within the community" may be. Moreover, it is not always clear what is meant by the term "community". As Annette (2008: 392) observes, 'community is an elastic concept which allows for an enormous range of meanings'.

Indeed, as a wealth of research literature highlights (Rappoport, 1977; Bellah *et al;* Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1996; Putnam, 2000), community can be both a social and a psychological construct. Within his influential theory, ~~Etienne~~ Wenger (1998; see also Lave and Wenger, 1991) conceives communities in terms of practice. For Wenger, communities of practice are co-operative endeavours which share a notion of identity derived from that particular community. Such identities (and the communities themselves) are continuously the subject of dialogical development as members understand and shape their relationships within and to the community in question. As Lave and Wenger (1991) point out, participation within a community of practice can be, in and of itself, educative. For these reasons, communities can be multiple, fluid and dynamic. How one understands community can often involve an amalgamation of spatial, relational and identity-based factors. Moreover, we should be mindful that the ways in which a particular community is conceived and experienced may not always be shared by members of that ~~given~~ community.

The advent of virtual communication has added further complexities to the question of how individuals (and indeed citizens) understand and interact with their communities. Related to this, there is contestation within both academic and policy circles about the spheres of public

life within which responsible community action can, and should, take place. Whilst some studies have sought to draw helpful educational distinctions between "vertical" participation (community activities, charities, sports clubs) and "horizontal" participation (political affairs, real decision-making processes) (see Jochum *et al*, 2005; Keating *et al*, 2010), others studies have arguably less helpfully sought to sharpen this distinction by prioritising pupil involvement in the latter over the former (see Crick, 2002; Nelson and Kerr, 2005, 2006; (for a more detailed consideration of these tensions see, for example, Peterson and Knowles, 2009). As Annette (2008) suggests, how the community is understood is not educationally inconsequential in determining the sort of activities in which learners may engage. It is worth noting that the YCA pilot project on which we report defined youth community action in the following open terms: 'Community Action can involve any kind of activity that involves doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives or to benefit the environment' (CCCU, 2010). As we report below, this led to schools and pupils having broad understandings of what "counts" as community action.

Schools and meaningful community action activities: evidence of challenges

There is evidence that schools have found it difficult to establish meaningful community action activities beyond the school environment itself (Benton *et al*, 2008, Keating *et* al, 2010; Arthur, *et al* 2009). Writing in 2007, Cleaver *et al* (2007: 9) makes this clear, asserting that "children and young people's participation is patchy, piecemeal and uneven and there is no one agreed way of evaluating its impact. Young people do not have equal opportunities to develop the underpinning knowledge, understanding and skills as well as the attitudes and values, necessary to make participation work."

Whilst schools may develop constructive relationships with community partners, such links are rarely comprehensive for all pupils. It remains the case that interaction between community partners and pupils occur primarily *within* the confines of the school environment rather than *beyond* it. Related to this is the extent to which schools actively seek to discover and engage with those community activities which pupils undertake outside of their schooling. There is an increasing body of research (Arthur *et al*, 2009; Pye *et* al, 2009; Mason *et al*, 2010) which suggests that whilst young people may well engage in activities outside of school, often as a result of their involvement in community and faith-based organisations,

schools may not always be in a position to recognise these nor makes links to them in their curricula.

As we have shown in our review of policy and research evidence, the involvement of young people in their communities through voluntary activity is clearly important to those determining youth policy, and has been the subject of informed research and evaluation. Yet it is clear that there are difficulties, tensions and challenges at conceptual and practical levels. We were interested particularly in the perceptions which young people and their teachers hold regarding community involvement and action. With this in mind, we drew on data collected from a sample of young people and teachers involved in one of the five YCA pilot projects. Our aim was to explore the perceived barriers to, benefits of, and opportunities for engagement in community action activities. Through this focus, our research seeks to add to the developing body of knowledge relating to the community involvement of young people.

Research Questions

The research process has been guided by the following questions:

(1) how do pupils perceive and understand their involvement in community action?

and

(2) how does this compare to the perceptions and understandings of the teachers responsible for co-ordinating pupil involvement in community action?

Method

As previously stated, we draw here on data collected from a sample of young people and teachers involved in one of five YCA pilot projects. The research aims and design were influenced by a service level agreement between the project funder (one of the five local authority pilot areas for the YCA initiative) and the research teams' institution. This included the requirement to develop an evaluation strategy. The funder expressed the wish to evaluate qualitative impacts, including pupil and staff attitudes to the project. The research questions were therefore developed as part of the evaluation strategy by the research team in

consultation with the project sponsor. Due to the early termination of the pilot projects by the Coalition government (as referred to above), the data was not included within unpublished local authority or governmental reports as originally intended.

The Sample

A total of 4592 Year 9 and Year 10 pupils (aged between 13- and 15-years- of-age) were involved in a Local Authority-led Youth Community Action pilot project across 14 schools. Two of the schools were schools whose pupils had severe and/or complex learning difficulties, and one was a selective grammar school (schools which select and admit pupils based on their passing an entry test at aged 11) for girls. Of these 14 schools, data was collected by questionnaire from 9. In 6 of these schools, pupils and teachers also participated in individuals and group interviews**.** Pupil anonymity was respected, pupil participation was voluntary, and parents/guardians had the option of removing their child from participation in the data collection. The data was collected toward the end of the Summer Term in June 2010, a time in which the schools were actively seeking to engage pupils in community action activities.

The questionnaire and interview schedule were piloted using a class of Year 10 pupils (14-15 year olds) attending an Academy school (a school which receives direct central state funding, usually part-funded by a sponsor, and which is outside of local government control, according it greater freedom in areas such as staffing and curriculum) in the same county, but which was not part of this YCA sample. This lead to some minor modifications of questions for clarity.

Data collection procedure

In the main study, questionnaires were distributed and collected by a team of trained researchers. Schools could choose whether to complete the survey on-line or on paper.

Paper-based collection procedure

A pre-prepared script was read to participants, which included the aim of the research, instructions for the completion of the questionnaire, and the participants' right to withdraw. These were administered to groups of pupils either in their class or in specially convened assemblies. Since participation in the ~~both the~~ questionnaires and interviews was voluntary, the data was gathered through a self-selected sample. However, since administration of the

paper based questionnaire occurred on specific days, researchers did rely on school staff to provide opportunity samples. School staff were requested to select representative cohorts of pupils to participate. Four pupils whose parents indicted that they did not wish them to take part in the research were excluded from the final analysis. In the two schools for pupils with severe and/or complex learning difficulties, the researchers read the questions to individual pupils with the support of a teacher, and completed the responses for the children.

On-line collection procedure

In those schools that chose to complete the survey on-line, the researchers read the same script, then distributed a URL for the on-line survey. The researchers stayed with the pupils until they had completed their responses and collected the paper questionnaires or ensured they had exited the on-line survey tool. In following the same procedure for both paper-based and online responses, any survey mode effects were minimised.

Achieved sample

In total, 614 questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 24.0% of the pupils in the 9 participating schools (N=2561). Of the questionnaire responses, 56.7% (N=348) were provided by pupils in year 9 and 42.2% (N=259) by pupils in Year 10 (1.1%, 7 did not respond to this question). Of these, 27.9% (N=171) were male, and 67.4% (N=414) were female (4.7%, N=29 did not respond to this question). The number of questionnaires returned varied between schools. Two schools accounted for 54.2% (N=333) of the questionnaires returned. One was a technology high school and the other a selective grammar school for girls. 11 semi-structured interviews and one focus group were conducted with pupils in six of the participating schools, with a further 8 semi-structured interviews conducted with teachers.

The Questionnaire

Questionnaire development

The design of the questionnaire began with an examination of instruments employing a strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ), since this was appropriate to the context and carries the benefits that it is ‘easy to complete and user friendly because of the briefness and positive attribute items, and is sensitive to change’ (Van Roy *et al*, 2008: 1304). Whilst SDQs have also been shown to demonstrate convergent validity with other instruments of

psychological adjustment, our questionnaire included only those elements related to pro-social behaviour and social engagement. Such questionnaires have robust psychometric properties (Goodman, 2001) and look at a number of aspects of pupil behaviour – emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems and pro-social behaviour – which, it was hypothesised, could associate well with community engagement activities. However, the SDQ is primarily a screening tool for positive and negative psychological attributes, whose psychometric properties have been investigated as a full 25 item measure (Stone *et al*, 2010). This present study was not attempting to 'screen' or classify pupils, merely to provide accessible ways for them to describe their behaviour and attitudes. The final questionnaire therefore was influenced by, but did not seek to replicate in full, a number of existing instruments. This included recourse to SDQs, but also to other instruments. Specifically, instruments we found helpful included those employed by Arthur *et al* (2006) in their research on the development of dispositions of virtue in 16-19-year-olds, that used by Hannam (2001) in his research into participation and citizenship, that employed by Warden *et al* (2003) in their exploration of children's perception of pro-social behaviour, and those used by D. H. Cameron (2010) and Muijs *et al* (2010) in their respective studies on school leadership and networking in education. Each of these studies explored the self-reported behavioural attitudes and perceptions of young people and, therefore, provided useful models for the questionnaire used in the present study.

Questionnaire design and content

The final questionnaire was divided into five components. Section one focused on a range of behaviours, attributes and perceptions, with pupils asked to self-report on these. The first subsection centred on Community Engagement, and asked respondents to indicate, for example, if they were a member of a community organisation and if they had a good knowledge of the local community. Subsection two asked respondents to indicate their engagement in Pro-social Behaviours, such as sharing with others and helping others. In addition it asked if they often got into trouble. The third subsection asked respondents to report their Personal Characteristics/Ambition, and, in particular, aspects of their personal behaviour including completing tasks and taking responsibility for their own actions. This subsection also included questions relating to the importance that respondents attached to exams and whether they had a clear career ambition. The fourth and last subsection concentrated on Social Behaviour, with respondents asked to report on how well they got on with others, the extent to which they spend their spare time alone, and whether the school had

an impact on their ability to be a good citizen. For each question, participants were asked to respond along a five point Likert-type scale ranging from 'Always true to Never true'.

Section 2 gathered bio-data, school year, school attended, gender, religious group, and ethnic origin. These last two questions were open ended since it was felt this would allow pupils to designate themselves as they felt most comfortable.

Questionnaire analysis

The questionnaire data was analysed in three ways. Initially, the scores were recorded into a data set using SPSS 17 and a series of descriptive statistics were calculated, producing the sum total of responses to each question. Second, a factor analysis was undertaken to investigate whether elements within the questionnaire responses related to each other. Factor analysis is a technique which allows the researcher to identify if there are underlying correlations within questionnaire responses, thus indicating common constructs (Field 2005). Third, since both the descriptive statistics and the factor analysis showed clustering around responses that could be seen as gender specific and 19.5% (120) of the respondents were from a selective girls' grammar school, a series of Chi^2 tests of association were carried out to investigate if there was an association between gender and response. Where there was an association, these tests were run again on a second data set where the responses of the pupils from the selective girls' grammar school were filtered out. This permitted an investigation of whether the associations found represented a gender difference across the sample or if it was related to that particular school.

For qualitative responses, a thematic analysis was undertaken. Each interview was transcribed with the responses for each pupil grouped under similar headings and themes. In this sense an 'open coding system' (Strauss & Corbin 1990) was developed to identify themes and areas of particular interest, concern or ambiguity (Pigeon and Harwood, 1997). Since the research is largely exploratory, the themes devised during the initial analysis took the form of 'categories' consisting of a number of linked responses between participants (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Categories were identified initially based on issues relating to the previous literature review, with these themes revised and added to during the analysis.

The Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with 11 pupils and 8 teachers in 6 of the 9 schools from which data was collected. Additionally, in one school a focus group interview was conducted with 15 pupils. The aim of the pupil interviews was to collect rich data on the community action activities the pupils were involved in, any barriers which they felt inhibited their engagement in such activities, and the benefits which they believed they either had accrued, or could accrue, from community action. The aim of the teacher interviews was to provide more detailed information through which we could more effectively contextualise the responses of pupils. It would also allow comparison between the perceptions reported by pupils and those of the teachers working in their schools. The semi-structured interview questions were divided into four sections. Questions in the first section related to community action activities in which the pupils had been involved. Those in section two focused on issues related to getting involved, including sources of information and barriers to involvement. Section three centred on personal development, including any benefits which pupils felt they had attained through their involvement in community action activities. Section four contained one broad question which prompted pupils to reflect generally on the activities in which they had been involved.

Results

Quantitative findings: Factor Analysis

The Factor Analysis correlation matrix showed significant clustering ($p>.001$) between the responses to a number of the questions, suggesting that elements in the questionnaire were addressing some underlying constructs. The Principal Component Analysis extraction method and the Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization method were employed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.884, which, being close to 1, indicates that the pattern of correlations were relatively compact and thus a factor analysis was appropriate. In addition, Bartlett's Test of sphericity was significant ($X^2 = 5423.79$, df=528 $P<.0001$), again indicating that factor analysis was an appropriate test (Field 2005). 33 factors were initially found. Factor loads were restricted by size with those within +/- 0.4 suppressed (Field 2005). This left 8 factors, (accounting for 56.58% of the variance). In terms of the eigen values, factor 1 explained 23.88% of the variance, factor 2, 7.51%, factor 3, 5.82%,

factor 4, 4.71%, factor 5, 4.38%, factor 6, 3.88%, factor 7, 3.32% and factor 8, 3.07% (see table 1).

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1 Social Citizenship	7.881	23.882	23.882	7.881	23.882	23.882	6.052	18.341	18.341
2 Lack of social efficacy	2.477	7.505	31.386	2.477	7.505	31.386	2.267	6.868	25.209
3 Community involvement	1.921	5.820	37.206	1.921	5.820	37.206	2.156	6.534	31.744
4 Neighbourhood and community awareness	1.555	4.711	41.917	1.555	4.711	41.917	1.777	5.384	37.128
5 Getting on well with others	1.446	4.382	46.299	1.446	4.382	46.299	1.725	5.227	42.355
6 Isolation/adult company	1.281	3.882	50.181	1.281	3.882	50.181	1.680	5.092	47.447
7 Career and applied orientation	1.096	3.323	53.503	1.096	3.323	53.503	1.525	4.621	52.068
8 Conformity anxiety	1.014	3.073	56.576	1.014	3.073	56.576	1.488	4.508	56.576

Table 1 Initial Eigenvalues and variance explained for the first 8 factors

	Component							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Social Citizenship	Lack of Social Efficacy	Community involvement	Neighbourhood and community	Getting on well with others	Isolation/adult company	Career and applied orientation	Conformity anxiety
I am helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	.791							
I care about other people's feelings	.774							
I would make an effort to befriend another student who needs comforting, cheering up or someone to support them	.691							
I try to be nice to other people	.686							
I would try to help another person in my class with their work	.682							
I often offer to help others (parents, teachers, children)	.640							
I am kind to younger children	.626							
I often volunteer to help others	.621							
I feel angry when I see people being badly treated	.609							
I share with others, for example CD's, games, food	.598							
I look after the environment	.473							
I am able to take full responsibility for my own learning	.455							
I get on with people from a variety of backgrounds	.438							
I find it difficult to concentrate		.829						
I get easily distracted		.783						
I get angry with other people		.539						
I am nervous in new situations. I easily lose confidence		.521						.451
I help out in the community			.761					
I am a an active member of a club or community organisation			.757					
I know most of my neighbours				.716				
I have a good knowledge of the local community				.658				
I care about what happens locally				.466				
My school/college helps me to become a better citizen					.651			
I like people in my school/college					.591			
I prefer working as part of a team					.480			
I always finish the work I'm doing					.479			
I get on better with adults than people my own age						.776		
I generally spend my spare time alone or keep to myself						.733		
I have clear idea about the career I would like							.760	
Passing exams is the most important reason for school/college							.728	
I enjoy engaging in discussions and learning about current affairs and how they affect our lives							.413	
I often get into trouble		.458						.595
I do as I am asked	.438							.494

Table 2: Factor loading for the 8 extracted factors

As can be seen from tables 1 and 2, the first five factors explained a large proportion of the variance (46.3%). For this reason, our analysis initially focused on the first five factors, each of which have been ascribed an illustrative label reflecting the responses within that factor.

‘Social citizenship’ (factor 1)

Factor 1, which we have labelled ‘social citizenship’, explains 23.9% of the variance and includes a significant number of the pro-social and citizenship behaviours and attitudes with which our study was interested. The analysis showed a clustering of answers from questions generally concerned with caring and helping behaviours, positive attitudes to befriending others and being kind.

‘Lack of social efficacy’ (factor 2)

We have labelled Factor 2 ‘lack of social efficacy’, since it relates to being easily distracted, getting angry with other people, feelings of anxiety and lack of confidence in new situations. Although intuitively it might be reasonable to assume such attributes would negatively correlate with community involvement, we did not find any evidence of this.

‘Community involvement’ (factor 3)

In our analysis, Factor 3, which we have labelled ‘community involvement’, showed a correlation between responses to two questions – “I help out in the community” and “I am an active member of a club or community organisation”.

‘Neighbourhood and community awareness’ (factor 4)

Factor 4, which we have labelled ‘neighbourhood and community awareness’, indicated a link across our data set between pupils’ knowledge of their local neighbourhood and community and a concern for it. The pattern of responses therefore suggests that those pupils who know more about their local neighbourhood and community are likely to report greater levels of concern about what happens within it. This finding is important, and suggests that pupils’ learning about their neighbourhoods and community is likely to be beneficial toward developing affective attachments to them.

‘Getting on well with others’ (factor 5)

We have labelled Factor 5 ‘getting on well with others’. This includes enjoying being part of a team, liking people in their school/college and relates to finishing what is started. It also includes an acknowledgement that their school/college has helped them to become a better citizen.

It is interesting to note from the factor analysis that pupils' self-reporting of behaviours and attitudes relating to social citizenship do not load into a common factor with their reporting of community involvement or neighbourhood and community awareness. These loaded into factors 3 and 4, which only explained 5.82% and 4.71% of the variance respectively. Thus we were not able to thematically link them in this research. For the pupils in our data-set, simply possessing pro-social behaviours and attitudes was not a sufficient and necessary condition for their community awareness and involvement. This suggests that, at least for a significant number of pupils in our data set, active engagement in the community requires something more than the possession of pro-social behaviours. Similarly, the factor analysis of our data set evidenced no clear association between those factors which represent 'psychological attributes' (factors 2 and 5) and pupils' responses to those questions grouped under 'community involvement'. In the analysis presented here we focus on the three factors which relate most closely to community action and participation, namely 'social citizenship' (factor 1), 'community involvement' (factor 3), and 'neighbourhood and community awareness' (factor 4).

Quantitative findings: gender differences

In addition to the factor analysis, a series of Chi^2 tests were conducted to investigate if gender was associated with responses. Since it could not be assumed that the difference in responses between girls and boys was directional, a two tailed hypothesis was explored; that is, that there will be a significant association between gender and response to each question. When explored for the whole sample, this showed that for a number of questions there was a significant association between gender and response (see table 3). It should be noted that Table 3 shows only those questions where a significant association (p<.05) was found between gender and response for the whole sample and the effect of analysing the data once the responses from the selective girls grammar school was removed. However, it should be acknowledged that this Chi^2 test was a post hoc comparison, and that when the Bonferroni correction is accounted for the acceptable statistical level for each question falls to P<0.002. Under this stricter criteria, although a difference was evident, there was no significant gender difference when the data from selective girls grammar school was removed - with the exception of the statement 'I am kind to young children' (see columns A and B in Table 3). Therefore, there are limits to the extent to which we can draw conclusions regarding the

significance of gender differences. We suggest that this area warrants further investigation across a larger sample.

It also has to be acknowledged that this pilot project had a selective sample on which to draw. In addition, the population sizes in the schools studied differed and we were only able to draw on a sample within each school (in the two special schools these were very small). There is likely to have been a clustering effect in terms of pupil characteristics. So although tentative evidence of gender differences was found, it is possible, given the selective nature of the sample that the standard error could have increased. Therefore, firm conclusions cannot be drawn. It is suggested that this research is repeated on a larger scale using a different sampling methodology.

	All schools [girls n = 414; boys n = 171; total n = 585]	Column A Significance when Bonferroni correction applied	Selective grammar school removed [girls n = 201; boys n = 171; total n = 372]	Column B Significance when Bonferroni correction applied
Community Engagement				
I look after the environment	X^2 = 16.18 df = 4 p<.01	*No*	X^2 = 9.49 df = 4 p<.05	*No*
I have a good knowledge of the local community*	X^2 =12.03 df=4 p<.02	*No*	X^2 = 4.43 df= 4 p> .2	*No*
I care what happens locally	X^2 = 10.11 df = 4 p<.05	*No*	X^2 = 4.43 df = 4 p> .2	*No*
Pro – social behaviour				
I share with others, for example CDs, clothes and food*	X^2 = 13.53, df =4 p<.01	*No*	X^2 = 9.12, df = p>.05	*No*
I do as I am asked*	X^2 = 12.67 df = 4 p<.02	*No*	X^2 = 7.74 df=4 p>.05	*No*
I am helpful if someone is hurt or unwell	X^2 = 45.8 df=4 p<.001	*Yes*	X^2 = 17.55 df=4 p<.01	*No*
I am kind to young children	X^2 = 43.75 df=4 P<.001	*Yes*	X^2 = 28.06 df=4 P<.001	*Yes*
I often help others, parents, teachers,	X^2 = 25.42	*Yes*	X^2 = 5.3	*No*

children*	df=4 *p*<.001		df=4 *p*>.2	
I would make an effort to befriend another student who needs comforting, cheering up or someone to support them*	X^2 = 21.82 df=4 *p*<.001	*Yes*	X^2 = 8.24 Df=4 *p*>.05	*No*
I would try to help another person in my class with their work	X^2 = 22.85 df=4 P<.001	*Yes*	X^2 = 7.23 Df=4 Not sig *p*>.05	*No*
I try to be nice to other people often volunteer to help others*	X^2 = 24.58 df=4 *p*<.001	*Yes*	X^2 = 2.74 df=4 *p*>.2	*No*
I often volunteer to help others	X^2 = 30.86 df=4 *p*<.001	*Yes*	X^2 = 17.45 Df=4 *p*<.01	*No*
I feel angry when I see people being badly treated*	X^2 = 24.33 df=4 *p*<.001	*Yes*	X^2 = 3.28 Df=4 *p*>.2	*No*
Personal Characteristics				
I get easily distracted*	X^2 = 11.18 df=4 *p* <0.05	*No*	X^2 = 8.71 df=4 *p*>0.05	*No*
I am nervous in new situations. I easily lose confidence	X^2 = 20.2 df=4 *p*<.001	*Yes*	X^2 = 13.46 df=4 P<.01	*No*
I care about other people's feelings	X^2 = 52.66 df=4 P<.001	*Yes*	X^2 = 6.8 df=4 *p*>.1	*No*
I am able to take full responsibility for my own learning*	X^2 = 19.94 df=4 *p*<.001	*Yes*	X^2 = 5.19 df=4 *p*>.2	*No*
Social Behaviour				
I get on better with adults than people my own age*	X^2 = 13.08 df=4 *p*<.02	*No*	X^2 = 7.77 df=4 p>.05	*No*
I like people in my school/college	X^2 = 9.67 df=4 *p*<.05	*No*	X^2 = 12.3 df=4 *p*<.02	*No*
I get on with people from a variety of backgrounds	X^2 = 14.18 df=4 *p*<0.01	*No*	X^2 = 2.11 df=4 *p*>.2	*No*
My school/college helps me to become a better citizen	X^2 = 20.31 df=4 P<.001	*No*	X^2 = 15.95 df=4 P<.01	*No*

*Table 3: Differences between boys and girls: questionnaire responses *indicate where after removal of respondents from the selective girls' grammar school resulted in a non-significant association being found.*

Qualitative findings: the interviews

A number of semi-structured interviews were conducted with pupils and with teachers responsible for co-ordinating their community action activities. In line with our research questions, this permitted us to explore, in more detail, pupils' perceptions and understandings of their community action and, to investigate any differences between these and the perceptions of their teachers. The interviews were transcribed, and analysed thematically in relation to the nature of community action engaged in, the barriers (real or perceived) to community action, and the benefits (real or perceived) of community action.

Differences between the responses of pupils and teachers

Our analysis of the interviews suggested differences in the perceptions and understandings of community action and service held by pupils and their teachers. A finding of particular interest concerns the reporting of involvement in community action activities. When asked to describe the community action activities in which they currently participate, pupil responses were rather limited in scope. Pupils largely reported involvement in sporting clubs and associations (both within and external to the school) as examples of their community action. The following interchange was typical:

Interviewer: Okay, can you tell me the type of activities you currently undertake?

High School 2 Pupil C: Erm... I dunno really...

Interviewer: ..it can be anything from campaigning, charity work, care work, helping out in clubs... anything like that

High School 2 Pupil C: I did do a sports club, but er...

Interviewer: How long ago was that?

High School 2 Pupil C: Dunno really...

Interviewer: ...in the past year?

High School 2 Pupil C: Yeah

Interviewer: What was that?

High School 2 Pupil C: Me and like my friend done a rounders thing

The rather limited responses provided by pupils contrast sharply with those provided by the teachers responsible for co-ordinating their community action activities in school. The senior teacher responsible for co-ordinating community action at the school of the pupil cited above describes pupil activities in more expansive terms:

Interviewer: Can you tell me the kind of community based activities your students currently undertake?

High School 2 Co-ordinator: A whole range of them at the moment, erm... they've got involved in activities arranged by the local [county] council... that promote, er, healthy living and healthy lifestyles; Primary school students, they supported Primary schools; um, they've got involved in community projects such as planning for [a local carnival based event] which the local [borough] council have been doing. They've gone out and helped housing associations with areas of graffiti, litter picks on estates and they've also done lots of entertainment and er, drama, theatre, dance productions for the public, often at reduced rates, or free entry...

This response was characteristic of those provided by the community action co-ordinators across our sample.

Barriers and benefits

Our interview data also provides an insight into a further theme of our research, namely the self-reported barriers to and benefits of community action. With regard to barriers, pupils and teachers alike point to a range of practical issues. These include time pressures, the pressure of examinations, a lack of opportunity and information regarding how to become engaged, financial costs and, at least in terms of the non-selective high schools involved in the sample, the perceived physical distance involved for pupils in getting to their communities. A further

notable barrier which was frequently reported by pupils was peer-pressure. This is something which the teachers co-ordinating pupils' community action also cited as a barrier:

> *High School 1 Co-ordinator:* I think the biggest factor [barrier] for some of them is... peer pressure. Pressure from your peers, in the sense that they don't want to be picked on, or... name callings... I think that would be the biggest thing. If we had an ethos in the school where more people are readily willing to come forward and engage in community activities, that wouldn't be a problem...

A clear difference between pupil and teacher responses regarding barriers concerned the focus of the latter on ensuring pupil safety. Related to this, we found examples of the perception that community action was something which was more appropriate and easier to access for pupils in their post-16 education and training. The following response from a co-ordinating teacher is illustrative:

> *High School 4 Co-ordinator:* It's very difficult... youngsters are keen to get involved in volunteering but, the minimum age seems, nearly always to be 16, 17 or even 18. The age group we are working with, although they're prepared and want to get involved, they're told no, you're too young and in actual fact they're very capable, but it's a worry because of health and safety and safeguarding issues...

This issue appears particularly noteworthy, given the differences between the YCA and NCS initiatives considered in the introduction.

The difficulty in finding community action activities for pupils under the age of 16 was also reported by pupils in the selective grammar school for girls. Pupils explained that when they attempted to find information and opportunities for community action it was evident that these were largely directed at those over the age of 16. It was notable that participants did not

cite the need for any further education in the skills and capacities central to effective community involvement when they were asked what they considered the barriers inhibiting community involvement to be. Moreover, when asked how they might engender and facilitate greater community action amongst pupils, teachers tended to focus on solutions for reducing the practical barriers (such as finding opportunities which did not impact on pupils' day-to-day curriculum and which were local to them) rather than provision for workshops and training in community involvement.

A further notable finding from our interview data relates to the sources through which young people obtain information about community action opportunities. Many of the pupils interviewed cited the school as the primary (and often only) source of information for finding out more of information about, and to help to participate in, community activities**.** The following two responses, both of which highlight the importance of outside speakers visiting schools, are illustrative:

> *Grammar School 1 Pupil C:* we have some charities we work with [in school] …we have public speakers come and talk to us… arranged by teachers.

> *High School 5 Pupil A:* …someone came into the school and that is when we decided to get involved in the voluntary work.

Pupils also cited assembly presentations, form time, posters and activities organised by other pupils as ways in which schools raised their awareness of community involvement opportunities.

Discussion of Findings

The findings presented here have helped to answer our two research questions; namely how do pupils perceive and understand their involvement in community action? And, how does this compare to the perceptions and understandings of the teachers responsible for co-

ordinating pupil involvement in community action? Perhaps not surprisingly, given the literature alluded to in the introduction (for example, Cleaver *et* al, 2007; Keating *et al,* 2010; Mason *et al*, 2010) our sample was found to present mixed perceptions and understandings of community action.

Our questionnaire findings suggest a pattern of responses in which those pupils who know more about their local neighbourhood and communities are likely to report greater levels of concern for what happens within them. This finding suggests that pupils' learning about their neighbourhoods and community is likely to be beneficial toward developing affective attachments to them. As other research suggests, an important aspect of developing young people's action in their communities is the fostering of their understanding and affection for those communities (see, for example, Crick, 2000; Benton *et al*, 2008). Moreover, for the pupils in our data-set merely possessing pro-social attitudes was not a sufficient and necessary condition for community awareness and involvement. This suggests that active engagement in the community requires something beyond the development of pro-social behaviours (a point we return to later). The findings also suggest that a number of pupils are involved in community-based activities outside of their formal schooling contexts (though as reported above, this was largely in terms of memberships of sporting clubs). Nevertheless, for both the pupils and teachers in our sample the school can and does act as a significant facilitator of community action. In this sense the school acts not only as a community in itself (and therefore as a site of community action), but as a facilitator of activities within the wider communities beyond the school environment. In this regard, our findings support those of a number of other more extensive research projects in this area (Arthur *et al,* 2009; Keating *et al*, 2010) which point toward the school as a central institution in developing greater levels of young peoples' engagement in their communities.

In our study, barriers to community involvement are similar to those identified within other research literature in the field (see for example Cremin *et al*, 2009). Whilst issues of time and financial constraints did impact upon pupils' involvement (or lack thereof), it was also the case that certain social factors played a part in limiting engagement in community activities. Although pupils were able to cite the personal social benefits which may be procured (such as meeting new people and widening their social networks), they reported a lack of self-esteem

and referred to a lack of volunteering as a social norm as reasons for not participating. Peer-pressure seemed to be an important factor in limiting pupil willingness to become involved. This finding is interesting when contrasted with the pupils' own self-reporting which did not suggest a strong correlation between those attributes labelled 'social citizenship' (including positive attitudes to befriending others) and both 'community involvement' and 'neighbourhood and community awareness'. It seems, therefore, that whilst pupils *in interviews* reported a lack of self-esteem as a barrier to community involvement, their questionnaire self-reporting of attitudes and behaviours did not suggest that indicators of positive self-esteem necessarily correlated with higher levels of engagement in the community. This contrast was unexpected and suggests that further research regarding the significance and impact of self-esteem as a potential barrier to community action would be helpful. As suggested previously, it should be acknowledged that our interview sample was a subset of the participants completing the questionnaire. Since those undertaking interviews volunteered to do so, we are not in a position to know precisely how representative the interview sample is in regard to the larger sample of pupils.

Our findings also pointed to differences in teacher and pupil descriptions of community action activities. Whilst the teacher co-ordinators were able to provide reasonably detailed examples of community action activities in which pupils were involved, these were rarely reported by the pupils themselves, who tended to identify involvement in sporting clubs and creative art groups as examples of community action. Additionally, although the examples given by the co-ordinators were more expansive than those of pupils, they are still somewhat limited compared to those cited in the literature as examples of what should constitute young peoples' community involvement, such as campaigning, raising awareness, and undertaking regular charitable work. Most notably, pupil responses were concerned largely with participation at a horizontal level – what is commonly referred to as 'civil particiaption' – rather than at a vertical level – what is commonly referred to as 'civic participation' (Jochum *et al,* 2005: 11-12). Once again, the difficulties, tensions and subtleties in defining and understanding "community", and therefore "community action", are evident. Although not a specific aspect of this present study, how participants understood and conceived 'community' would have impacted their understandings of community action.

Implications

The extent to which schools can and should cultivate, support and facilitate the engagement of pupils in their communities continues to be a relevant question at policy, research and school level. The findings of the present study, when considered in the context of current government policy and existing research literature, have implications and point toward further research. We suggest that two are of particular significance, given the shape and direction of current educational policy and practice in England.

The role of the school

It was clear across our sample that both pupils and teachers understood this role to be facilitative; that is, that the role of schools was to provide information regarding community action opportunities and/or provide for these themselves. As reported above, the notion that part of the school's role is to educate pupils regarding the cognitive and affective attributes required to understand their communities and community action was not voiced by our study participants. We might posit, at least as far as the teachers are concerned, that there was an underlying assumption that pupils either already possessed these attributes or that there was no need for specific provision to help pupils in *learning for* community action. The literature suggests that education and development is an important factor in effective community action**.** Pye *et al* (2009: 54) reflect, for example, that in their study young people recognised 'the important role that educational institutions can play in encouraging people to volunteer' and desired to 'create a culture where volunteering is valued as a tool for personal and community development'. We would suggest, therefore, that the provision of meaningful learning activities for developing and supporting young people's community involvement should be a key role for schools.

For most of the pupils involved in our interview sample, and their teachers, the school can and does act as a central source in developing pupils' awareness of opportunities to become involved in community activities. This finding is pertinent at a time when the National Curriculum is under review and at which the National Citizen Service (NCS) has not only aimed at post-16-years-of-age, but has purposively removed the school as the key provider. We suggest that policy-makers should be mindful that '[W]hat may appear to be a lack of interest in volunteering among large sections of youth may to some degree reflect a lack of knowledge of what it could involve' (Pye *et al*, 2009: 9). When evidence suggests that there are 'few (or no) opportunities for young people to take advantage of work in the community' (Arthur *et al*, 2009: 40), relegating the role of the school seems questionable. If schools are to

remain central to the engagement of young people in community service, attention should be paid to the precise nature of the role. Our research suggests that in supporting youth community action, schools' focus was fundamentally on auditing engagement, providing a repository for information, and providing opportunities for their pupils. Often missing from discussion of the schools' role (or at least often left implicit) was the notion of educating and training young people in the knowledge, skills and attributes necessary for community action. This appears somewhat anomalous, given the general consensus in the field of community involvement for the need to provide not simply opportunities for engagement but apt learning experiences before, during and after the engagement activity (cf. Warwick *et al*, 2010). More attention needs to be paid to the provision of space for pupil learning and reflection as an integral part of their community service activities. This is particularly pertinent, given findings that over the duration of the ~~NFER's~~ CELS (Keating *et* al, 2010: 17) longitudinal study, 'there was a notable dip in rates of civic participation as the cohort progressed through Key Stage 4 (i.e. age 14 to 16)'.

A discourse of community action

Our study also suggests that a majority of pupils lacked a clear vocabulary for explaining, in detail, their perceptions of, and involvement in, community action activities. One possible explanation for the lack of depth in pupils' responses is perceived lack of ownership on behalf of the pupils. There was no clear sense in the interviews that pupils were taking responsibility for their own projects. We heard very little, other than involvement in sports clubs, of any activities which, to employ the language of Hart's (1992: 8) influential Ladder of Participation, were 'young-people initiated'. This leads us to reflect on the extent to which pupil responses would have had more depth had they had a greater sense of ownership of them.

Conclusion

Set against a policy background of renewed governmental interest in providing young people with opportunities to engage in community-based social action activities, this study sought to explore and consider the perceptions and understandings of young people regarding their involvement in community action. Moreover, the study also looked to compare young

peoples' perceptions with those of the teachers responsible for co-ordinating the community activities. Our study suggests that those pupils who know more about their local neighbourhood and community are likely to report greater levels of concern for what happens within it. Additionally, for pupils in our data-set simply possessing pro-social behaviours and attitudes was not a sufficient and necessary condition for their community awareness and involvement. We have contended that, at least for a significant number of pupils in our data set, active engagement in the community requires cultivation and learning beyond the possessing and development of pro-social behaviours, something which was not evident in the pupil and teacher perceptions of the barriers to community involvement reported in our interviews. We have argued that greater attention needs to be paid to supporting pupils in understanding the extent, depth and nature of their involvement with the community both within and beyond the school environment. Such a task poses a particular challenge at a time when the UK Conservative-Liberal Democrat government have implemented a policy initiative, in the form of the National Citizen Service, which limits the role of schools and no longer focuses on pupils of 14-16 years-of-age. In such a context we suggest that it is vital, therefore, that the role of schools in supporting pupils' involvement in the community is not neglected, but is recognised, deepened and extended.

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