'The art of democracy': young people's democratic learning in gallery contexts

Robert Lawy[1], Gert Biesta[2], Jane McDonnell[1], Helen Lawy[1] and Hannah Reeves[3]
[1]School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of Exeter
[2]The Stirling Institute of Education, University of Stirling
[3]Spacex, Exeter
Corresponding Author: r.lawy@exeter .ac.uk

Abstract

In this paper we report on research which aimed to explore the opportunities for democratic action and learning in a number of artist-led gallery education projects in the South West of England. Our research takes an approach to citizenship learning and democracy that is less focused on citizenship as a specific subject in the formal school curriculum and the achievement of specific citizenship outcomes that can follow from that. Rather, it is more focused upon understanding how democratic practices that are embedded in the day-to-day lives of young people contribute to their democratic learning and participation as citizens. Drawing upon conceptual categories and concepts that illuminate the process, we demonstrate the nature and character of democratic learning of young people. An implication arising from that is the need for practice orientated research in other contexts (e.g. work, leisure and home) to fully understand the nature of democratic learning.

keywords: democratic learning, citizenship learning, gallery education, interpretative research

Introduction

> *It was kind of a majority thing and then people who didn't want we kind of persuaded but not in a 'do this' way but in a 'well this might be better than that cos of this', but in more like a joking way.* (Isobel)

> *(The artist) taught us a different experience. Like here the way we study art here, this was a different way to do it, not like sitting there doing writing.* (Jack)

The idea that school is an institution where young people can and should learn to be 'good' and 'contributing' citizens through the transmission of a particular set of knowledge, skills, values and dispositions has been affirmed in a variety of policy documents and educational reports (for example, Commission on Citizenship, 1990; Dearing, 1994; Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1998). The emphasis in these documents has been largely focused upon the transmission of so-called 'citizenship dimensions' (Kerr, 2005) – the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions that are considered to be the essential pre-requisites – and upon the technical questions, issues and improvements that can be made to educational outcomes.

We recognise the importance of school based education that emphasises the need to provide young people with the knowledge and skills that they need to be 'active' and contributing citizens. For example, it is commendable that schools are not only focussing on teaching civics but are encouraging internal democratic processes through such mechanisms as school councils (see Rudduck & Flutter, 2004). However, this still only affects a small number of young people and represents a small part of the whole environment in and from which young people learn. We are conscious however that this approach which seeks to 'produce' good citizens is predicated on the assumption that young people are somehow a 'deficit' category in need of advice and support to enable them to be citizens. It both individualises the *problem* of young people's citizenship by assuming that they lack the 'right' knowledge, skills and dispositions to be democratic citizens, and individualises the *idea* of democratic citizenship as an identity that will somehow emerge when all its citizens have acquired the 'right' citizenship dimensions (Biesta & Lawy, 2006; Biesta, 2007). It projects young people's citizenship into the future with democratic citizenship as the taken-for-granted outcome of a particular developmental or educational trajectory. Being a citizen is thus an adult identity which excludes young people, and in so doing it denies certain citizenship rights and responsibilities to young people who have yet to achieve full citizenship status. By way of contrast, citizenship-as-practice (Lawy & Biesta, 2006) starts with the assumption that young people are 'fellow citizens' (de Winter, 1996). Citizenship learning does not precede citizenship, rather it is a lifelong process that is not simply confined to young people's learning in school but is inclusive of their learning outside school where they learn the value of democratic and non-democratic ways of action and interaction and about their own position as citizens (see also Biesta, 2008).

The concerns that we have identified emphasise the importance of focusing attention upon contexts other than schools where young people can also learn democracy through their participation in the communities and practices that make up their lives. Elsewhere we have reported on research which explored young people's everyday

citizenship learning. We achieved this through a longitudinal research design which allowed us to capture their experiences and understandings of different contexts and practices over time (see Biesta *et al*., in press). We were able to demonstrate the importance of *contexts* and their objective characteristics, the importance of *relationships*, and also the importance of young people's background experiences and dispositions which predisposed them to certain ways of acting and being. In the research we present in this paper we have used this framework to focus on one particular setting, viz., that of artist-led projects with young people in art galleries, in order to explore the opportunities for democratic action and learning afforded by these settings. The research focused on seven artist-led gallery education projects that took place in the South West of England in 2006 and 2007 (see Biesta *et al.*, 2008).

Gallery education and young people's democratic learning
The emerging research literature in the field of gallery education has predominantly focused on understanding the particular nature of learning opportunities, practices and outcomes within gallery education projects. It has demonstrated the impact of participation in gallery education on the development of critical thinking, self-determination and identity, and human, cultural and social capital (Taylor, 2006). Moreover it has highlighted the experimental, collaborative, dialogical and open-ended nature of learning processes, particularly when compared to formal school education where the formal requirements of the curriculum militate against activities and relationships that become possible outside of school, in gallery spaces and other mediated contexts.

For Pringle (2006, p.13), the commitment to working with professional artists is one of the defining characteristics of contemporary gallery education which, at its best, involves intense and challenging, facilitated sessions with a small number of participants. The great advantage of gallery-originated practice is that it is not bound by curriculum directives and assessment requirements as is the case with school-based art education. This allows artists 'to take risks and experiment and they feel comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty' (Pringle, 2006, p.14). This, in turn, provides for learning opportunities that are significantly different from learning in other more formal educational settings. It allows both for engagement with 'art-in-process' and with 'artists-in-action'.

What has been relatively absent in the discussion and in the research is attention to the democratic quality of the learning processes and practices, and their impact on young people. At one level this is surprising because the open-ended, collaborative, experimental and in a certain sense egalitarian nature of gallery education projects provides young people with ways of being and acting – including ways of being and acting *together* – which exemplify some of the key-characteristics of democratic practices and processes. Gallery education provides artistic learning opportunities for the participants as well as furnishing them with significant democratic learning opportunities. Gallery education is not only an important field for understanding aesthetic and artistic learning but also for understanding civic and democratic learning, and it is this dimension that we have focused on in the research reported in this paper.

Our research has been informed by a particular view of citizenship and of democratic practice. Here democracy is not simply a form of government or political system but

extends to the participation in the 'construction, maintenance and transformation' of all forms of social and political life (Bernstein, 2000, p.xxi). Democracy is what John Dewey has referred to as a 'mode of associated living, a conjoint communicated experience' (Dewey, 1966, p 87) that is concerned with inclusive ways of social and political action that allow for plurality and difference (Säfström & Biesta, 2001). This is not a kind of 'disinterested pluralism' in which people simply live alongside each other, rather it is an 'engaged pluralism' in which people seek to live and act together in ways that recognise plurality and difference. Hence, democracy or the democratic process is less concerned with producing 'good' citizens and more concerned with processes of collective judgement and decision making that are inherently democratic. In its shortest formula, it is about 'action-in-plurality' (see also Biesta, 2006).

The research
The research was conducted as part of the national *enquire* programme and focused on seven artist-led projects that took place in the South West of England in 2006 and 2007. [1] The projects involved a collaboration between five art galleries, six artists and six educational institutions (five secondary schools and a pupil referral unit [PRU]).[2] Three of the projects ran over several months (five full days over two terms) whereas the four projects that were observed in the second phase were conducted over a much shorter time span (2½ days to 5 days over a two week period).

The young people involved in the projects were all volunteers who, with the exception of the young people from the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), were drawn from their respective art classes in school. The projects comprised mixed groups of young people that varied in size from a minimum of 6 young people to a maximum of 12 young people. A total of 32 young people were observed comprising 11 boys and 21 girls. The basic idea of the projects was use the gallery installations and other artwork to sensitise the young people to the artistic possibilities and use that engagement as a basis for a democratic approach to 'making art'. Where possible the young people also met with artists who had exhibitions at the galleries. All were encouraged to produce installations and artworks using a wide range of techniques, including animation, photography, video, sculpture, book-making, poetry writing and performance.

For example, in the first phase of the research a filmmaker (together with a youth worker from the PRU) worked with a group of five pupils aged 15 and 16 on five days between January and March 2007. On the first day of the project the group visited the gallery and discussed the work in the exhibition. The group then went on a walk in the area surrounding the gallery and took images on their mobile phones which they shared. The artists then led some simple visual exercises, which introduced the concept of iconic and symbolic signs to the young people. Back at school, the group decided to work on a project which used camera phones to make photographic work of 'mixed up' everyday activities and locations – an exam on the beach, sleeping on the moors, watching TV in the car park etc. The rest of the project took place at the school or in various outdoor locations chosen to fit with the ideas on the list of *misplaced* activities. Whilst in these locations the young people were often required to explain their project to members of the public. The resulting images are striking and one particular image of a staged exam on the beach, is to be sited permanently in the school.

In the second phase of the project two artists worked with 5 girls and 5 boys studying in Year 10 for two and half consecutive days. Initially, the group were introduced to one element of an exhibition about racism in which they listened to stories and studied picture-posters of people's experiences. Over the next two days the young people explored ideas connected to the theme of racism, culture and identity through in-depth discussions, creative activities, physical exercises and games. A member of the local Sikh community who was involved with the racial justice organisation was invited to meet the student group and talk about her experiences of racism. Members of the group experienced wearing a turban and a religious headscarf in the streets of the city and fed back their experiences to the rest of the group. The rest of the project focused upon the 'cultural award relay' (a person presented with an award nominates someone else in turn). The group discussed the value of awards and questioned who gets nominated for awards and how. They then created their own awards to distribute to people whom they felt deserved recognition. The students brought in special clothing and dressed up and went out into the streets of Plymouth to present people such as the owner of a dolls' house shop, a quayside chip shop and a street cleaner, with their awards. On their return to the gallery they discussed the responses of the people and why this sort of project might be called art.

Our research had three aims:

1) to explore and understand the experiences of the participating young people (aged 14/15);
2) to document the dynamics of the projects, with a particular focus on democratic learning;
3) to assess the impact of participation in the projects on young people's democratic learning.

We made use of three modes of data-collection:

1) semi-structured observations of project activities;
2) group-interviews;
3) individual interviews with a selection of participating young people (n=13);
4) group interviews with the artists.[4]

In this paper we focus on the outcomes of the individual and group interviews. All of interviews (individual interviews and group interviews) were transcribed and internal reports were written about the interviews with the artists. The analysis was conducted by the research team using a grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1992; Charmaz, 2006). The analysis aimed to a) identify similarities and differences in the interpretations and understandings of the young people; b) identify themes and issues and gain an understanding of underlying interpretations, experiences and processes, and; c) connect the outcome of the analysis with the theoretical framings informing the research.

Findings

Our research aimed to capture the experiences of the young people in the projects in order to develop an understanding of the significance and impact of their participation on opportunities for democratic action and learning. In this section we present the findings from our analysis of the individual and group interviews we conducted. We

do this in four steps. We first reflect on the particular nature of the gallery context and how this was perceived by the young people. We highlight the difference between the gallery context and the school context and pay attention to the specific nature of artistic activity. In the second step we focus on the young people's experiences of decision making, which provided them with important opportunities for democratic action and practice. In the third step we discuss some factors that we identified as being conducive to democratic action and practice, including the time it took for the young people to become comfortable with different ways of working with each other and with the artists, the particular qualities of the relationships they developed with the artists, and the important role of trust in these relationships. In the fourth step we explore how this contributed to their learning. We illustrate the findings from our analysis, which has been presented in more detail in Biesta *et al.* (2008), with material from the interviews.

Working and learning in a gallery context
All of the young people that we interviewed commented on the differences between the gallery settings that they were working in, and the school environment that they had come from. All noted the relatively relaxed and open atmosphere in the projects compared to the more structured ways of working at school.

> *At school you're like told specifically what to do and stuff.* (Josey)

> *School is more of a guideline and you have to follow that guideline but you can do what you like so long as you stay to that. But in [the] project you have to make your own guidelines up. It was cool. I could do whatever I wanted.* (Dick)

> *They [artist educators] made me feel better because I didn't have to worry about having to try to do my best because I was more free to do what I wanted. … It was more like if I do something wrong then I can go and try again. It kind of made me feel better about my work.* (Paula)

This did not mean that all young people found the transition from school to the gallery context easy. Initially they found it difficult because of their expectations and assumptions about the role of the artists as teachers, and their own subordinate role in that relationship:

> *Because I was expecting it to be more like a teacher's thing, like she would be like a teacher, saying 'you have to do this', and then when she didn't mind what we did, like if you were just like sat thinking or doing whatever. I was quite surprised, because I was expecting her to say, 'right, come on then, lets get going' and like telling you what to do, so yeah, I was surprised.* (Liz)

The contrast to the structure of school and what the young people perceived as the relative lack of structure of the project saw some young people thriving on the openness whereas others were left with feelings of aimlessness. A minority of the young people found it quite difficult to make sense of the perceived lack of an obvious plan or outcome orientation.

It was good in some ways, but then it was kind of bad in some ways because you felt like you didn't have to do it. I know we did, but then it was more relaxed. (Janet)

… but there is such a thing as too much choice. I kept changing my work like a million times because there were so many ideas. I couldn't get hold of one idea. (Ann)

Others were more positive about this aspect.

There was no routine it was sort of, it was really well structured but although it didn't have a structure there but the structure came good because there was no structure. It flowed well. You worked more freely I think. Your ideas become more apparent. Your ideas flow better I think. School has got a lot of structure to the lessons and stuff and there's something to focus on whereas this was all your own ideas and stuff and it was really good. (Steve)

He (artist educator) didn't tell us right from the beginning what we were doing and he made everything that we were doing was just by chance and then you realised that it was all coming together for this big thing. It's nice not being told sometimes, just doing it. (Debby)

The perceived differences between the gallery and school context also had to do with expectations and ideas about art and artistic work. Many young people assumed that their gallery experience would mirror their experiences of school-based art where the meaning of art-work was more fixed. This was another factor that made the transition from the school to the gallery context difficult for some of the young people.

I wouldn't call this art, I'd call it random pictures. (Olivia)

.. I do think maybe if we'd spent more time doing art rather than them talking to us and making us do writing it would have been better. (Mandy)

I would have liked to have been there longer. The first day was sort of .. I was a bit strange by it all. (Steve)

Although there was a strong focus on providing opportunities for democratic action and learning within the projects, this was always and necessarily balanced against aesthetic and creative concerns. This impacted on the young people's perceptions of art and artistic work in a number of different ways.

(It's taught me) just to be more open minded about work and be more imaginative, like since then I would think of other ways of doing stuff. (Janet)

It's made me look outside the box and thinking about even more types of art, even like a conversation can be a piece of art. (Molly)

It's like influenced how my school art work has changed since I started, because I used to only do drawing and painting because it's what the teacher

said would be best, but now I do loads of different forms of art in my book so it's kind of changed the way I approach art. (Joe)

The making and taking of decisions in a democratic environment
The processes through which young people made decisions and choices was central to all of the projects. Group decision making was typically built into a series of small tasks in the early sessions with the young people taking more ownership of the process as time went on. We saw examples, particularly in the later sessions, where the young people engaged in group discussions, checking for the consent of the whole group before making decisions. The young people learned the importance of allowing everyone in the group the opportunity to 'voice' their views and concerns, and recognise that some of the ideas to emerge from that discussion could be better than those that they had at the outset. In this respect the decision making dimensions of the projects helped the young people to gain an understanding of the dynamics and complexities of inclusive and democratic forms of collective decisions making.

> *Well I think it's sort of helped us to take into account that we can't just think about our own ideas, you have to think about other people's ideas and how they think things should fit together.* (Ollie)

This recognition of plurality and difference was not easy, particularly in small friendship groups:

> *It could be a bit more argumentative at times because you're more comfortable with them. Whereas if you're in a big group, I think it could be awkward.* (Janet)

> *When you work in small groups you tend to go with the people you get on with best, so like, because they're your friends, you're most likely to agree with them on most things.* (Ann)

But it could also be difficult when the smaller groups came together.

> *At some points it was like everybody throwing in, which was quite good because sometimes you can hear something and think, 'actually that's a good idea' and just make it a louder thing so other people can hear. Sometimes it was just like, 'shut up so we can talk'. ...* (Isobel)

Sometimes taking a back seat and listening was the most appropriate option.

> *Claire didn't lead it but she was often the one who decided on some things but it was mostly a group decision but Claire was a bit more deciding. ... it got a bit annoying sometimes because she took control but all the ideas were fine and I didn't have problems with what we were doing. I just went along with it ... because I didn't want to cause any misunderstandings or arguments. It probably wouldn't but just in case I went along.* (Sally)

When it came to actually producing the art-work the young people worked in a variety of different ways. Some of them were appreciative of the opportunity to discuss their ideas and work together.

> *We don't normally get the chance to say what we want because we don't have a lot of discussion. We just get our folders and get on with it because we know what to do. We can ask the teacher for help or talk to them if we want to but we normally know what to do.* (Debby)

Others would barely communicate with each other during an activity but would act in parallel observing one another and only pull their actions together to produce a final product.

> *We just came up with the idea by ourselves and kept adding stuff. Like I put a chair then she added on. ... No we just did it. I just let her have a go, what she wanted to do and I watched it. ... It was really amazing actually. You can do what ever you want.* (Jack)

> *I didn't kind of talk with Dave. We just sort of did our own thing and then at the end I asked him where to put his art thing.* (Olivia)

Time, relationships and trust
One of the key differences between earlier projects and those that were conducted in the second phase, was that the earlier projects were conducted over a much longer time frame, over several months rather than over a week or a two week period. This had a number of ramifications both for the artists – who commented on the difference in terms of being able to respond to the young people's requests and their plans – and for the young people themselves. There was more time for the relationships between the artists and young people to develop, with the young people able to make use of the opportunity between the project sessions to reflect-upon their work and produce new ideas. In one of the early projects the young people produced a piece of lens based work in this way, and were able to discuss ideas and possibilities with the artist in a measured and collaborative way.

> *We left it about a week and then you come back and like I thought of some stuff over the week and then like it's probably easier to like think of stuff when you're not actually under pressure like you've only got a certain amount of time to think of it in, if you know what I mean.* (Paul)

Although the young people in the later projects were not able to benefit in the same way from these opportunities, they were still able to benefit and learn from working in a more democratic and less time constrained and structured way.

> *It took about an hour, it was me, Alex, Kurt and John just writing on the white board just jotting down loads of ideas and then choosing the best ones.* (Paul)

> *I think it's given me more confidence probably. And the way you can give your ideas and things, no matter what people think and just get your word out there and your ideas. ... your idea's not necessarily the best, like when you hear other people's ideas and think, 'oh yeah, I hadn't thought of that'.* (Claire)

Another significant dimension had to do with the quality of the relationships between the young people and the artist educators. Mutual respect was an important in this

regard. This was manifested in a number of ways through the actions and practices of all the participants. All of the artists, for example, were on first name terms with the young people. In one case an artist educator spent his lunch period playing table-tennis and pool with the young people.

> *Talking to her by her first name, I don't know, just instead of Miss or Mrs like a teacher. ... We saw her as more of a friend than a teacher.* (Andy)

> *The art teachers ... weren't like teachers they were acting like associates no... like people who are part of the group, like people on the same level. They weren't really ordering us around or anything so it made us feel more better I think because I think when there is a teacher or someone who you have to follow the rules by an all that it kind of makes you feel insignificant. ... They weren't really bossing us around or doing anything like that. They were actually more friends.* (Paula)

The key element in all of this was the trust that was being invested in the young people by the artist educators.

> *They (artist educators) make you look at things and then they were taking ideas out of you rather than them giving you ideas and going along with it. Yeah they take ideas out of you. ... It's better because it makes you think a lot more and also quite a lot of the exams are like thinking for yourself it's better if you're not being fed like in my old school if you know what I mean, we were just given the information and it was just like copying, like copying and remembering it in exams. That's not very good for your thinking and doing things yourself.* (Josey)

The implications of this investment in trust were generally beneficial to the young people. Paula, for example, was able to develop her self confidence by showing people around the photographic work that her group had produced.

> *I was embarrassed because personally I thought I was not that good at English and since they picked me to go around and do that I was 'Can't do this'. As well as having to show around people I didn't know that's kind of good because it built up some self confidence in me to do that and I was more open with what I said. (...) (I) gained a little bit of self confidence and opened me up new ideas and opportunities ...* (Paula)

Learning
Although the young people generally found it easier to talk about their experiences of participation than about what they had learned from it, there was evidence within the data of the impact that participation had had on them. This partly had to do with practices of democratic decision making. For example in the early sessions of a round one project the artist encouraged the participating young people to take collective responsibility for small decisions affecting the everyday running of the project. Over time the young people became more used to such ways of decision making.

> *That's why like at the end of the day and after lunch was like our best decisions, because we'd got used to it.* (Claire)

It was like we were more used to the way of working. (Andy)

Some students also showed evidence of learning about themselves-in-context, Claire, for example, mentioned how she has been able to lead a group through a process of decision making and how, through this, she had developed an understanding of the complexities and dynamics of democratic and inclusive ways of coming to a decision.

I think it's given me more confidence probably and the way that you can just give your ideas and things, no matter what people think and just get your word out there and your ideas and how if ... how you can just take control of a situation if you can see it's not going anywhere, rather than just kind of think, 'oh, no-one else is saying anything' we'll just like go and ... if you know what I mean? (Claire)

A similar insight in the dynamics and complexities of collective decision making was described by Isobel.

It was kind of a majority thing and then people who didn't want we kind of persuaded but not in a 'do this' way but in a 'well this might be better than that cos of this', but in more like a joking way. (Isobel)

Several young people emphasised the importance of the fact that the artist educators encouraged them to make their own decisions and trusted them in doing so.

I could take an idea and expand on that idea really. (Dick)

This also gave young people the confidence to act differently. As Sarah explained in relation to the racism project:

I was proud. ... I was proud when we did the banners and we went round shouting in the streets. I was quite proud of that because I wouldn't have been able to do it if it was school or something but it was the fact that it was outside of school that I felt I could do it. (Sarah)

For some of the young people the project provided an opportunity for developing their self-confidence in a non-threatening environment. In other cases the young people had their eyes opened to issues which they had not previously considered.

I didn't know about stuff ... like racism and culture and stuff like that. I learned a lot but some of it I didn't hear and some I don't get because I'm not very good at English and I don't understand. (Jack)

It has changed a lot of the way I think. I know it sounds silly because it was only a couple of days but it because of what it was about, racism. On the last day when we were talking to (one of the organisers) about stuff and I realised that adults actually care about what children, well teenagers are saying. Cos in school you don't feel that you are treated ... well not with respect cos our teachers are quite good but like you feel like you don't count. In the art thing

they were really interested in what we were doing and (the artist educator) was interested in us. (Debby)

Discussion

Our research aimed to explore the experiences of young people who took part in the projects in order to gain an understanding of the potential of artist-led gallery education projects for democratic action and learning. Our findings reveal that the projects did indeed provide the young people with a different space for action and learning. The young people commented particularly on the differences between the projects and their experiences at school. They not only experienced and acknowledged these differences, but also valued them, although they had different views about how valuable the opportunities for action and learning provided by the gallery projects were for them.

Some young people saw the open-endedness of the activities as positive as this provided them with opportunities for experimentation and ownership; others found it more difficult to work without clear guidelines and structures. The research not only revealed significant differences between the school and the gallery context – and thus confirms the importance of contextual factors in democratic learning (see Biesta *et al.*, in press) – but also showed that the transition into the context of gallery education takes time and needs time. Young people need to get used to working with adults in ways that are not structured by the power relationships and expectations that structure their schooling.

The research also highlights the central role that processes of decision-making play in providing opportunities for democratic action and learning. It is in relation to this that we see the particular potential of arts-based activities for democratic learning. The relative openness of artistic work, both with regard to process and outcomes, requires continuous judgement and decision-making. It was particularly when judgements and decisions were made collectively and when young people encountered a multiplicity of views and preferences that the projects started to model the complexities and characteristics of democratic practices and processes.

The research also reveals the crucial importance of the quality of relationships – and thus confirms the important mediating function of relationships within contexts for democratic action and learning (Biesta et al., in press). When artists are able to relate to young people on the basis of trust and when the young people are able to experience that they are trusted, the dynamics of the process changes and young people can move to a position where they are able to take responsibility for their actions and activities. This, again, is a transition that takes time and needs to be given time.

The interviews also provide evidence of the ways in which young people were able to reflect upon and learn from their experiences. Some were able to articulate the lessons they had learned from their participation explicitly, whereas this remained more implicit for others.[4]

Conclusions

The projects provided an opportunity for young people to experience and play a part in a complex, conceptual, social and aesthetic world outside of their school

environment. Gallery education, as it was conceived in the projects, was not about *teaching* art to young people but rather about *doing* art with them. It is precisely this engagement in practice that provided particular opportunities for democratic action and learning. Utilising these opportunities required both skilful 'navigation' from the artists whose role was to facilitate the work of the young people and a commitment from the young people themselves to that process. For the artists the difficulty was in supporting the visual and emotional responses of the young people and developing them into artistic products and practices without dictating the outcomes. Young people were challenged both with regard to their understandings of art, acknowledging that there is more to it than drawings, paintings and sculpture, and with regard to working collaboratively with others under conditions that were very different from their experiences at school.

The transition from 'school' to 'gallery' was not only from one place to another but also involved a move from one set of expectations and actions to another set. It was a transition that required young people to 'unlearn' certain actions and behaviours and to 'learn' others at the same time. – the aim being to achieve a position where young people felt sufficiently trusted that they could begin to take ownership and full responsibility for their own actions. This took time and was more successful in the longer projects where the young people had time to establish relationships of trust, both to work with artists in a way that was far- removed from the rules, roles and expectations that structure schooling, and to work collaboratively with their peers and trust their own judgements. 'Space,' 'time,' 'relationships' and 'trust' are therefore crucial notions in understanding the dynamics of democratic learning in gallery education.

Although the artists recognised the importance and potential of the democratic dimension of their work, it was always balanced against other aesthetic and creative concerns including the use of different media. These artistic claims sat alongside the democratic aspiration for being open to the ideas, interests and representations of the young people. Management of these sometimes competing claims required a high degree of skill, continuous judgement and decision-making on the part of the artists (see Biesta *et al.*, 2008; Taylor & Houghton, 2008). It involved encouraging the young people to work experientially and with their imagination – to explore different ways of being and acting that relied on them taking greater responsibility for their actions than they might normally expect to do in their everyday lives in and out of school. The concern was to facilitate the capabilities of the young people in order to allow them to shape the conditions that shape and structure their lives. Where judgements and decisions were made collectively and when the young people encountered a multiplicity of views and preferences as part of their decision making processes, the projects started to model the complexities and characteristics of democratic practice.

We would not wish to claim that democracy is something that can or should be taught to young people in a gallery context or for that matter in any other context. Our claim is that artist-led work in gallery contexts can provide opportunities that are conducive to young people's democratic learning. Moreover, that opportunities for democratic learning are not limited to school or family but can apply to many (and perhaps all) of the various dimensions of young people's lives. Democratic learning is about much more than teaching young people about their rights and responsibilities or about

teaching them how to be a good and contributing citizens. It is fundamentality concerned with the realities of judgement and 'action-in-plurality' (Biesta, in press) – what they do and how they do it. It refers therefore to the importance of living with plurality and acting in ways that respect 'difference' and 'otherness'. Clearly, more research is needed that is focused specifically upon democratic learning within different dimensions of young people's lives. Here, we might expect the elaboration of our existing conceptual categories together with development and use of additional categories, for example of risk-taking, identity and power, to help unravel the complexity of young people's democratic learning. The nature and character of young people's democratic learning processes are neither straightforward nor predictable. Indeed, what young people learn and how they learn it is not a precise science but an 'art', and one that we characterise as 'the art of democracy'.

Notes

[1] The *enquire* research programme is part of the Museums and Gallery Education Programme. It has been funded by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). To date it has encompassed 182 projects with 124 schools, 40 galleries, and has touched the lives of more than 7,360 young people (see Taylor, 2006; Taylor & Houghton, 2008). The programme has been managed by *engage*, in association with Arts Council England.

[2] The pupil referral unit was included as it had achieved Artsmark Silver, a national award scheme managed by Arts Council England that recognises schools with a high level of provision in the arts.

[3] The artists kept diaries which were made available to the research team. Although have not reported on these discussions directly in this paper we have referred to some of the issues that were raised by the artists, such as the pressures they faced. More information on this part of the project can be found in Taylor & Houghton (2008).

[4] We are currently conducting follow-up research with a selection of young people from the projects in order to gain a better understanding of the longer-term impact of their experience of participation.

References

British Educational Research Association (2004) *Revised ethical guidelines for educational research* (Southwell, BERA).

Bernstein, B. (2000) *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity* [Revised edition]. (Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield).

Biesta, G.J.J. (2006). *Beyond learning. Democratic education for a human future* (Boulder, Co, Paradigm Publishers).

Biesta, G.J.J. (2007) Education and the democratic person: towards a political understanding of democratic education, *Teachers College Record*, 109 (3), 740-769.

Biesta, G.J.J. (2008) A school for citizens: civic learning and democratic action in the learning democracy, in: B. Lingard, J. Nixon & S. Ranson (Eds.) *Transforming learning in schools and communities* (London, Continuum).

Biesta, G.J.J. (in press). How to exist politically and learn from it: Hannah Arendt and the problem of democratic education. *Teachers College Record.*

Biesta, G.J.J. & Lawy, R. (2006) From teaching citizenship to learning democracy. Overcoming individualism in research, policy and practice, *Cambridge Journal of Education,* 36(1), 63-79.

Biesta, G.J.J., Lawy, R. , McDonnell, J., Lawy, H. & Reeves, H. (2008) *The art of democracy: gallery education and young people's democratic learning (*Exeter: University of Exeter & Stirling: The Stirling Institute of Education).

Biesta, G.J.J., Lawy, R. & Kelly N. (in press 2009) Understanding young people's citizenship learning in everyday life: the role of contexts, relationships and dispositions, *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice.*

Charmaz, K. (2006) *Constructing grounded theory: a practical guide through qualitative analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications).

Commission on Citizenship, (1990) *Encouraging citizenship* (London, HMSO).

Dearing, R. (1994) *The National Curriculum and its assessment: final report* (London, School Curriculum Assessment Authority).

Dewey, J. (1966 [1916]) *Democracy and Education* (New York, The Free Press).

Glaser, B. (1992) *Basics of grounded theory analysis* (Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press).

Kerr, D. (2005) Citizenship education in England – listening to young people: new insights from the citizenship education longitudinal study, *International Journal of Citizenship and Teacher Education*, 1 (1), 74-96.

Lawy, R. & Biesta, G.J.J. (2006) Citizenship-as-practice: the educational implications of an inclusive and relational understanding of citizenship, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 54 (1), 34-50.

Pringle, E. (2006) *Learning in the gallery: context, process, outcomes* (London, Engage).

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (1998) [Crick Report] *Education for citizenship and the teaching of democracy in schools: final report of the advisory group on citizenship* (London, QCA).

Rudduck, J & Flutter, J. (2004) *How to improve your school: giving pupils a voice* (London, Continuum).

Säfström, C.-A. & Biesta, G.J.J. (2001) Learning democracy in a world of difference, *The School Field*, 12, (5/6), 5-20.

Taylor, B. (2006) The enquire-programme: communities of critical enquirers, in: B. Taylor (Ed.) *Inspiring learning in galleries* (London, Engage). [see also http://www.en-quire.org/]

Taylor, B. & Houghton, N (2008) (Eds). *02 Inspiring learning in galleries.* Research Reports (London, Engage). [see also http://www.en-quire.org/]

Winter, M. de (1996). *Children as fellow citizens: participation and commitment* (Oxford, Radcliffe).