

# Education in the North



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## ARTICLE

### **Democracy in schools, Dewey and the referendum on Scottish independence**

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## Democracy in schools, Dewey and the referendum on Scottish independence

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this study was to investigate young people's perceptions of authority, representation and their involvement in decision-making in school, beyond school and in the referendum on Scottish independence. The study took place during the year leading up to the vote on independence for Scotland which included voters aged 16 and 17 years old for the first time in a national poll in the UK.

The research was conducted at six secondary schools across two local authorities. Focus groups were held with 202 young people aged 15 to 18 years. Young people referred to the police and most frequently to teachers having authority over their lives and making rules for them to follow, rather than government or other institutions. In relation to schools, many said that they did not have any voice and that consultation with them was a pretence.

Most students felt that at 16 people were old enough to vote in the referendum but they did not feel well-informed with the exception of those studying the subjects Politics or Modern Studies. They saw the referendum as an important decision affecting their future and felt that residence in Scotland, rather than citizenship status, should be the main criterion for eligibility to vote. We considered the data in light of Dewey's work on democratic practices in schools and education for democratic participation in wider society. We note how Dewey's work continues to inform and educate us in democratic citizenship.

**Keywords:** Voting age; democratic education; citizenship education; schools; political literacy;

## **Introduction**

### **Democracy in schools, Dewey and the referendum on Scottish independence**

On 18th September 2014 there was a referendum in Scotland on whether the country should be independent of the United Kingdom. For the first time in a nationwide election the franchise was extended to include 16 and 17 year olds (voting age in the UK is traditionally 18). The study took place between September 2013 and June 2014 during the run up to the referendum. Scotland, as part of the United Kingdom, is signed up to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which includes article 12 (rights of children to be included in decisions that affect them). Using Dewey's works and, in particular 'Democracy and Education', as a foundation, this study investigates young people's perceptions of authority, representation and their involvement in decision-making. We considered three layers of participation in decision-making by young people: in school; beyond school; and in relation to the referendum on independence.

Following an earlier study in schools in South America by one of the wider research team it was decided to replicate this study in schools in Scotland in the unique circumstances of the lowered voting age for the referendum on Scottish independence (Stack, unpublished). It was decided to investigate the concept of political community in schools in Scotland, in particular focusing on young people's views on authority, rules, participation in decisions that affected them and whether they felt represented by elected politicians. In relation to the referendum young people were asked about voting eligibility in particular the reduction to age 16 which would affect some of the young people in school. We were interested in the potential contrast of the young people being part of the decision on independence but having little say over their school life.

First, we provide background to the study, detail the research question and the methods used. We consider both the curriculum around democracy and practices in schools in Scotland. Dewey's works and, in particular 'Democracy and Education', are at the foundation of this study and we will explain how Dewey's work is still, not only relevant, but helpful today to examine practices (or lack of them) related to democracy and citizenship in schools. From the outset the study was envisaged as one related to schooling in political community and democratic education.

### **Schooling in political community**

The term *schooling in political community* has been used because schools do not only teach about political community, for example in terms of politics and the skills and values needed

for political life in subjects like citizenship or general studies, schools may also incorporate aspects of political community. This might be evident in the relations of authority in schools and these relations may be partially grounded in terms of the authority of community members. There may be representational structures, for example in Scotland there are pupil councils, and there may also be 'horizontal' obligations that pupils feel towards their peers. While the 'community' part may seem easy to explain in that we are discussing the groups that young people feel part of and/or decide to join, the 'political' part encapsulates more than party politics and elections, but also the micro-politics of organisations that we are part of.

For Dewey, a community is not just a grouping of people who have something in common such as people with an interest in yoga, rather it is a group of people who come together and work towards a shared interest, such as the Greenham Common Protesters who campaigned against the siting of nuclear weapons in England (Hipperson, u.d). As Tiles (2005, p.266) puts it, people, according to Dewey, 'behave more as a community to the extent that they share equally in the identification and articulation of those interests and in the formation of politics designed to further them. ...a group of people behave as a *community* to the extent that they conduct their affairs democratically' (italics in original). Callan emphasises that attachment to a community, incorporating the emotional or 'affective dimensions of citizenship', should be focused into 'patriotic solidarity' (Ruitenbergh, 2009, p.273).

In the context of young people who are still at school who are voting in the referendum on independence, we can imagine they are part of many communities and several 'political communities'. As Lockyer (2008) states, 'the classroom itself is a political forum' (p.29). Most of the young people in our study were eligible to vote for the very first time as they would be 16 or older by the time of the referendum. Schools can be regarded as sites of authority in a similar way that Mycock (2014) refers to schools as 'sites of democracy' (p.10), thus we asked young people about authority and representation in relation to their lived experiences of school.

It must be noted that not all (political) communities are necessarily positive. Dewey gives the example of gangs in which a tight-knit community is formed but this would not be regarded as useful for wider society and democracy (1966, p.82). People form groups based on common interests but political communities may have closer ties and/or different types of bonds with representation and possible formal decision making as elements.

As Dewey stated 'Education, broadly conceived, is the process by which culture is reproduced' (cited by Tiles, 1995, p.94). For Dewey, democracy is not just a form of government, rather it is a kind of culture or a way of life or 'the idea of community life itself' (ibid, p.264). Instead of merely investigating if democracy, as a kind of culture, reproduces

itself through education, it is necessary to determine whether the forces which 'control (influence) the process of education are progressive or regressive' (ibid).

Dewey used different metaphors to describe the role of teachers and education in democracy, he wrote of teachers being 'the consecrated servants of democratic ideas' and of education being the midwife of democracy (Simpson et al, 2005, p.99 and p.102 respectively).

### **Democratic education**

In Scotland, the subject Modern Studies covers politics and sociology and there is a separate subject of Politics (SQA, u.d. a and b). 'Responsible citizenship' is one of the four capacities that is part of the national curricular framework, Curriculum for Excellence, and is meant to underpin school education (Scottish Executive, 2004). The other three capacities to be developed from ages 3 to 18 are 'successful learners', 'confident individuals' and 'effective contributors' (ibid). There is no separate compulsory Citizenship course for students in Scotland unlike other parts of the U.K. Instead, citizenship is meant to be woven through pupils' whole education from early years, through school and youth work. Parts of what may be called Citizenship studies in other countries are covered in courses such as PSHE, Personal, Social and Health Education (previously called PSE).

For Dewey, citizenship education should involve each student developing

- The capacity to vote intelligently
- The disposition to comply with ethical laws
- The competence to contribute economically to society
- The knowledge to function thoughtfully as a member of a family
- The ability to think independently
- The capability to serve sympathetically as a member of society, and
- The aptitude to lead democratically (cited by Simpson et al, 2005 p.107).

While Dewey is looking at students being part of a family and members of society Biesta (2013) has identified that the Scottish approach to what we can term democratic or citizenship education 'has a tendency to focus on the individual rather than the collective; on the social more than on the political dimension of citizenship; on social activity more than on political action; and on a community of sameness more than a community of difference' (p.328). Furthermore, Biesta finds this is a conception of citizenship education which focuses on the personal responsibility of the citizen and runs the risk of depoliticizing citizenship. He states that 'an exclusive emphasis on personally responsible citizenship may therefore be 'inadequate for advancing democracy' as there is 'nothing inherently *democratic* about personally responsible citizenship' (p.334, italics in original).

Alongside a concern about the content and direction of Scottish education policy documents related to citizenship there is also the worry that by making responsible citizenship everyone's responsibility it becomes no one's (Biesta, 2013).

It has been argued that the best provision occurs when specialist teachers lead citizenship education (Kerr, 2014). A more civic-republicanism form of citizenship education would work towards active and responsible citizenship (Lockyer, 2008, p.30).

Lockyer (2008) refers to the 'Advisory Group on the Teaching of Citizenship and Democracy in schools' or Crick Report (1998) in relation to how learning about controversial issues 'constitutes the essence of worthwhile education as distinct from training' (p.23). The Crick Report set out the rationale for introducing a separate subject of citizenship in England.

As Pring (2005) noted, political education needs to include 'an intellectually respectable exploration of the controversial issues which are central to political debate and resolution, then the school, college or university must itself be a "learning community" where such matters are subject to debate, argument and intellectual exploration' (p.125).

'Political literacy', a concept introduced by Crick (1977), is understood as being an important part of citizenship education (Pring, 2005, p.131). A still useful and comprehensive definition of political literacy from Crick and Porter (1978) is that it is the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to make a man or woman informed about politics; able to participate in public life and groups of all kinds, both occupational and voluntary; and to recognise and tolerate diversities of political and social values. (cited by Pring, 2005, at p.133).

However, this does not go as far as Dewey in terms of calling for schools to educate young people in democracy. It is not enough to be literate in democracy, future citizens are to be democratic players as well as readers of democratic life. In a similar way to Dewey, Ruitenberg (2009) argues that educating in terms of 'political emotions' necessitates 'the development of a sense of solidarity, and the ability to feel anger on behalf of injustices committed against those in less powerful social positions rather than on behalf of one's own pride' (p.277). As Pring puts it '[d]emocracy is both a means of achieving certain values and a way of life which encapsulates those values' (p.138). For Pring, political education is concerned with deliberations rather than actions and is most definitely not concerned with specified learning outcomes. 'Agonistic pluralism', in contrast to 'deliberative democracy', aims to channel passions into democratic action (Ruitenberg, 2009, p.272 citing Mouffe, 2000).

Lockyer (2008) argues for going beyond political literacy and procedural values, such as respect for truth and reasoned argument, but also involving learning by doing and requiring political engagement (p.26). In one of the local authorities a school referendum took place

almost exactly a year before the national poll. This gave the young people in all the secondary schools, including special schools, the experience of voting on a ballot paper exactly like the one to be used with the actual ballot boxes and in some cases, going to the polling places that would be used in the election. The Elections Unit for this local authority was carrying out its statutory duty in promoting democratic participation. According to Dewey in 'Democracy and Education', normally every activity engaged in for its own sake reaches out beyond its immediate self (p.245). Thus, voting in the local authority's secondary school referendum would have an effect beyond taking part in this school vote. Biesta (2013) stated that 'the most significant citizenship learning that takes place in the lives of young people is the learning that follows from their actual experiences' (p.331). By taking part in the school referendum using identical ballot papers, actual ballot boxes and, in some cases, voting in the polling places to be used in the referendum school pupils were experiencing voting activity. This is useful as while young people need an active programme of citizenship education, they also need opportunities to engage so that they know their rights, value democratic decision-making and understand the 'complexity of political decision-making' (Stoker, 2014, p.23). Lockyer (2008) cites the Crick Report (1998) which referred to the 'practical experience of decision-making and democratic processes (para. 3.19) in class and school councils (p.24). To fully implement Article 12 of the UNCRC children should be involved at every stage of decision-making processes (Lundy, 2007). If young people are consulted about what they learn, how they learn and how school is organised they will then be more ready to participate in wider civil society while at school and afterwards, thus laying the foundation for active democratic participation throughout their life.

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child lays down that every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously. Freeman (1996) observed that Article 12 is significant 'not only for what it says, but because it recognizes the child as a full human being with integrity and personality and the ability to participate freely in society' (Lundy, 2007, p.928). It has been said that Article 12 thus 'entitles and obliges' young people to become politically engaged (Lockyer, 2008, p.20). Being involved in decision-making should be understood as a legal imperative and every child's right rather than as 'in the gift of adults' (Lundy, 2008, p.931). Tan (2011) has argued that if schools are to properly involve children and young people, then there must be changes to the traditional power dynamics between staff, pupils, parents and authorities. Tan echoes Pring's (2005) disdain for the emphasis on outcomes instead of directly addressing the issues of social justice and the rights of children. By incorporating controversial issues like the referendum on independence into the classroom pupils can understand how their voice should be heard not only in elections but also in school.

Simpson et al (2005) detail how Dewey argued that if some people are limited by the school environment then everyone cannot develop to their full potential (p.81). By helping all pupils

to understand democracy and citizenship then everyone benefits from the more democratic society this creates. As servants of democratic ideals teachers should be trying to help people overcome the 'accidental inequalities of birth, wealth and learning'

(Simpson et al, 2005, p.104). We can see that Dewey continues to be relevant as he was also worried about 'a wave of nationalistic sentiment, of racial and national prejudice, of readiness to resort to force of arms' (cited by Simpson et al. 2005, p.81). For Lockyer (2008) compulsory political literacy education which is in line with Article 12 'has the potential to impact upon and transform relationships beyond the public sphere' (p.20). While Lundy (2007) notes the recognised gap between the UK's international commitments on the one hand, and what happens in practice in relation to educational decision-making on the other.

### **Research question**

- What are young people's perceptions of authority, representation and their involvement in decision-making in school, beyond school and in the referendum on Scottish independence?

In school, we were interested in finding out if we could find evidence of compliance with Article 12 of the UNCRC, namely the right of young people to have a say in decisions which affect them. Beyond school we aimed to find out about young people's perceptions of local government and the Scottish and UK parliaments. In relation to the referendum and the reduced voting age to 16, we wanted to find out if pupils agreed with the Scottish Government that young people's opinions were important or if they agreed with those in the press who saw the lowering of the voting age as a cynical move by the Scottish National Party, who had called the referendum, to garner more votes (The Telegraph, 2012). Birch, Clarke and Whiteley (2015) found that less than one person in three supported reducing the age of majority (p.308). Following the success of reduced voting age in the referendum, all political parties, including those in opposition in Scotland, now support votes at 16 and 17 (Electoral Reform Society, n.d.)

### **Methodology**

Previous research by one of the research team (Stack, unpublished), using research groups in schools, was built on for this study. Denscombe says that focus groups, with a moderator to facilitate group interaction, have 'a focus to the session with the group discussion being based on an item or experience about which all participants have similar knowledge,' (1997, p178). The focus group method enabled us to examine how the participants, with each other, understood the topics we were investigating (Bryman, 2012). It allowed the participants to probe each other's viewpoints as well as articulating their own. Thus providing the opportunity to explore how participants collectively made sense of the issues and constructed meaning



together. It has been argued that this is a more naturalistic approach than individual interviews (S. Wilkinson, 1998 cited by Bryman, 2012, p.504). It is the interaction of the participants that produces the data rather than the probing of the interviewer (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2008). While focus groups are generally quite contrived, in our study the participants were classmates, and, with the focus groups taking place in their classroom, the participants were perhaps more relaxed than may have been the case in another setting.

Benefits of using focus groups included the economical use of our time (Cohen et al., 2008), the participant interaction as referred to above and the involvement of a larger number of participants. While disadvantages in using focus groups include the potential for issues which may disrupt or cause a problem for the research such as confidentiality concerns (Halcomb et al., 2007 cited in Coe, Waring, Hedges and Arthur, 2017, p.191) and conflict in the group interactions (Gibbs, 2017). In this study the benefits outweighed the potential disadvantages and there were no instances of concerns related to confidentiality or conflict during the focus groups. Thus, focus groups were chosen as the best method to use to answer the research question and for practical reasons in terms of gathering as many views as possible, thus maximising research staff time, while at the same time being aware of the need to take up as little school time as possible (each focus group took place during one school period – between 45 and 55 minutes). We asked senior pupils to moderate (once they had participated in a focus group themselves) to enable them to experience participating as a researcher.

The university researchers contacted education officers in two local authorities to discuss the research study, to ask permission to conduct research in their schools and to determine which schools to approach first. An application for ethical approval from the University of Aberdeen was approved and an application to conduct research which was required in one of the local authorities was also approved. A total of six schools were approached and all agreed to be involved in the study, three in each local authority. The school focus groups were organised as part of the schools' existing Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), Modern Studies and Politics courses.

Three researchers (the first named author and two others) conducted a total of 43 focus groups involving 202 young people. When possible, the first focus groups in each school were conducted with pupils studying Higher or Advanced Higher Modern Studies or Politics. Timetables permitting, these pupils then participated in later focus groups with younger pupils in their school. It was hoped that this involvement would benefit them as research skills were required in their course. The pupils in the focus groups were aged between 15 to 18 year olds. Each focus group had between three and eight pupils. The focus groups were audio-recorded and notes were made by a participant from within the focus group (called the Group Leader) and separately by a research facilitator. To begin with the three researchers were the research facilitators with final year school pupils, then the final year school pupils played the

role of research facilitators with other year groups, timetables permitting. Members of the research team were present in all the focus groups. In one of the local authorities a school referendum on independence was held across all their secondary schools one year before the actual vote. In this local authority an online survey was conducted asking students about the school referendum experience. A series of meetings were also held with teachers and local government officials during the course of the research including one research interview with two teachers in the first school to take part.

**Table 1: Levels of deprivation in research schools' catchment area (information taken from Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2016)**

School	Catchment area	Participants
A	Mixed with fewer areas of deprivation	8 final year students (S6) 61 students in S5
B	Predominantly affluent with fewer deprived areas	6 students in S6 20 students in S5
C	Mixed with more areas of deprivation	9 students in S5
D	Mixed with fewer areas of deprivation	42 students in S5
E	Predominantly deprived	22 students in S5
F	Mixed with predominantly more areas of deprivation	34 students in S5

Handwritten notes of the focus group discussions were taken by both the Group Leaders and the research facilitators (students or university researchers) on pre-prepared focus group schedules. These notes were typed up and uploaded into Nvivo. The texts in NVivo were organised by question and the two sets of notes were compared to see if the recorded accounts matched. In some cases there were more details in one set of notes but there were no glaring disparities between the two versions of each focus group. We asked each group to reach an agreed response to each question, so we heard the group response rather than each individual student. This builds on the Dewey idea of a democratic community. While numbers of focus groups are provided below we were not interested in a strict quantitative account of how many of each focus group were of one particular opinion, or how many focus groups overall thought one thing or another, rather we were interested in the different answers and the proportions of focus group opinions rather than specific numbers of individual student responses that were recorded.

## Results

We explored to what extent the students felt represented by people in authority, what input, if any, they had on school decisions, whether they owed it to others to follow rules and we asked for their views on various matters related to the referendum on independence, in particular who they thought should be eligible to vote.

1. Do you feel represented by people in authority?

We asked whether students felt that MPs (Members of the UK Parliament) and MSPs (Members of the Scottish Parliament) represented voters. Only a minority said they did. Some said that MPs do not listen, others that when they do listen, nothing happens or action takes too long.

Some pupils felt that teachers and schools represent them but there were mixed feelings regarding this with roughly equal divide amongst focus group respondents. For example one participant said "They don't represent me, they're teaching me." While another made the succinct remark "Schools don't represent us, we represent them."

Some young people saw teachers as their advocates within the school when they were trying to change school policy or rules. Perhaps because the focus groups all took part in schools the young people concentrated on what happened in the school setting rather than talking about life outside.

2. *Input into school rules and decisions*

While we did not ask a direct question on input into school rules or decisions in 22 out of 43 focus groups pupils explicitly stated that they did not have an effective say with the rules and decisions made in their school. The pupils were aware of a variety of mechanisms through which they could voice their concerns about school rules and decisions but in 9 focus groups these were described as ineffective, un-influential or ignored. While it was acknowledged that pupil councils existed and held termly meetings, they were regarded as going over the same issues year after year and not achieving any meaningful changes.

3. *Do you owe it to others to follow rules and obey decisions?*

Most students had difficulty answering this question but when they went on to discuss it many replied in terms of 'vertical' obligation within school. Typically, they discussed whether their *teachers* represented them and similarly, in contexts beyond school, they gave answers related to 'vertical' relationships (parents, bosses). However, a significant minority did give answers related to 'horizontal' structures of power in relation to community and/or society. Students understood this as owing someone in authority the respect or good manners to do as was expected of them rather than thinking of owing to others in their group or owing to wider society to act in a particular way, to follow rules or laws.

4. *Voting in the referendum*

In September 2013 in one of the local authorities in which we conducted our research there was an authority-wide school referendum in its secondary schools.

All the participants in the focus groups were asked about the referendum on independence. The focus groups took place either around the time of the authority-wide school referendum or in the run-up to the actual referendum on independence. For the authority school referendum there were hustings meetings and school campaign teams for Yes and No. In the other local authority while there was less activity at the time of the study, every school had teaching materials from the two official campaigns, 'Better Together' and 'Yes Scotland'.

The following questions were asked at the Focus Groups:

*a. Do you think 16 is the right minimum voting age?*

In 24 focus groups most members answered that they agreed to the reduced voting age. They stated that you could: "Have strong opinions when 16"; "get a say in our future"; "Yes because you can marry and have a baby"; "we should be able to vote against it like everyone else"; "we're the future so we should have the biggest say"; "Voting for parliament affects you for 4-5 years but votes for independence affects for the rest of your life so 2 years doesn't make such a big difference".

In ten focus groups there was not consensus, with different opinions about the voting age and in 8 focus groups, students were negative or mostly negative about 16 and 17 year olds having the vote: "should stay 18 as per tradition"; "hormonal teenagers not in right position to vote"; "base their decisions on sport".

*b. Who should get to vote?*

In terms of residence and eligibility for voting, in 30 of the 43 focus groups all the students thought that those living in Scotland should be eligible to vote, for example one pupil said "Fair that Latvians etc. can vote because they live here." There was also support for residence for a certain amount of time, for example five or ten plus years, and this was important for a small number of groups. There were differing views in some focus groups with students making comments like: "Scottish citizens"; "Only those born and bred"; "Scottish people in rest of UK"; "everyone apart from illegal immigrants"; "if posted [abroad] e.g. in the military"; "Not students as temporary".

Thirty, out of a total of 43 focus groups, decided as a group that residence should be the determining factor on suffrage. There did not appear to be any differences between pupils in the different schools on this point.

*c. If eligible, how confident do you feel about voting?*

In 16 focus groups, members were very confident about voting and 7 focus groups were confident. There were a range of opinions in relation to this question and in 10 focus groups there were mixed views with one group noting there were lots of contradictory opinions. In another 9 focus groups students were not confident or were unsure, "Unsure, need to know more" and one person said "If they want 16 year olds to vote, they should educate them about the issues". These latter comments may be related to the timing of some of the focus groups being up to a year before the referendum.

## **Discussion**

After analysing the focus group notes we compared the findings with previous research and literature and noted where Dewey's work was still salient. The most frequently mentioned authority by focus group members was their parents and after that rules and authority were associated with schools and then with the government, police and employers. While pupils view government, police and employers as authorities in their lives, they did not feel represented by Members of the UK Parliament nor Members of the Scottish Parliament. However, some students said rules outside school were more binding with school being a good training for learning to obey (question 1). This finding seems to echo with a study of young people in the context of the 2010 general election in the UK it was found that a clear majority held a negative view of politicians and very small numbers had any trust in political parties or politicians (Henn and Foard, 2014). However, an ICM/The Guardian poll found that young people were less concerned than older people in terms of politicians keeping their promises (Stoker 2014, p.24). From this and other findings, Stoker suggests that young people's 'desire ... imagination, and the lack of cynicism' could 'challenge the way in which politics is done' if it is supported by a strengthened programme of citizenship education (2014, p.26).

Only a minority felt they could have an effective say in school rules. Several said that they owed it to teachers to obey the rules (vertical obligation) though often qualifying this with a fear of consequences if they do not follow the rules (question 2). Some young people felt obliged to others (vertical and horizontal), to obey rules and authority outside school. Many pupils understand being part of a political community but only within school. This may be related to the study being conducted on school premises in school hours.

In a study focused on schools, Quintellier and Hooghe's (2013) found that schools played a role in stimulating young people's intention to take part in politics, mainly through operating as stated by Dewey as a democratic community or 'schools of democracy' (p.579). They concluded from their study of 35 countries that it does matter whether school students perceive their school as 'a participatory democratic environment' where they can express

opinions and ideas, and can engage in school policy (p.580) but further research is required to understand the direction of causality.

About voting in the Referendum, most students agreed that non-temporary residence in Scotland should make someone eligible and most intended to vote because they felt it would affect their (individual) futures, while in terms of age, only a few shared critics' fears that 16 and 17 year olds would be unduly influenced or uninformed. Most felt confident of knowing what to vote, although many did not yet feel sufficiently informed and looked for help, especially from schools. Stewart, Wilson, Donnelly and Greer (2014) found in their research on 16 and 17 year olds voting in two health board elections in Scotland that providing sufficient information was particularly important for new voters. Their respondents suggested more expensive methods of disseminating information to new voters including via school. Our study had similar findings to Eichhorn, Heyer and Huebner (2014) who found that young people were interested in the referendum, looked for information and were able to tell the difference between different sources. Furthermore, they found that those who discussed the referendum in class were more likely to feel sufficiently informed than those who had not discussed the referendum. It was engagement with discussing the referendum in class that had a positive impact as opposed to taking the subject of Modern Studies or particular demographics (ibid).

Participants appeared to understand the lines of authority in school but some blurred the distinction between authority and representation, for example referring to teachers as representing them. Dewey wrote about the importance of community for creating and recreating democratic society. Stack et al. (2017 in press, p.11) state that 'vertical obligation outweighs horizontal' obligation but this is contrary to Dewey's idea of community in which everyone's freedom is linked to everyone else's. Dewey wrote about how belonging to a social group (with horizontal obligations) allows one to internalize a set of meanings that transform physical experience from something we merely react to in a physical way into something that has a shared meaning or connection (Pring, 2005, p.113). Thus, if on the one hand, the pupils are saying that they feel only obligation to those above, in a hierarchical or paternalistic sense, then where does that leave the idea of community and shared experience? Is it that where we are in 2017 young people don't really feel part of a community where shared experience brings shared meaning? How does that impact on voting (and voice) and the potential for serious political issues to be considered?

While Dewey stated that normally every activity engaged in for its own sake reaches out beyond its immediate self (1966, p.245), it would appear that young people in schools in Scotland are not experiencing enough activities which extend their feelings beyond themselves as individuals.

We now turn to Dewey's views on the importance of democracy, not only in relation to democratic education as a subject, but also to how schools are organised and how attitudes and opinions are formed, reformed and 'reconstructed' ... 'in the light of the interests and experiences of the whole community' (Tiles, 1995, p.267). What we can see is a mixed picture in the Scottish schools that we visited. While, on the one hand, young people were inclusive in relation to who should vote (a key test for Dewey of democracy is that it does not divide along race or national lines), there was little evidence of any traces of democracy in how schools or classrooms were run.

It has been suggested there has been too much vilification of young people's non-participation, lack of engagement and political apathy. For example, O' Toole, Marsh and Jones (2003) argued that rather than worrying about young people's participation in 'adult politics', government should engage with young people about the issues that concern them (p.359). If politicians addressed young people's concerns, such as university tuition fees in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, or the cost of housing, then young people may be more likely to vote in the first election they can vote in. Stewart, Wilson, Donnelly and Greer (2014) cite Franklin (2004) that when a person does not vote in the first election they are eligible to vote in then this may set a lasting pattern of non-voting (p.364).

There were many arguments made against giving 16 and 17 year olds the vote in the Scottish referendum (see The Telegraph, 2012). At one point a survey found a majority were against the change (Nelson, 2012 and Dahlgreen, 2013). An argument against the drop in voting age was that young people would vote in the same way as their parents. However, Eichhorn (2014) found that young people did 'not appear as easily biased and swayed to vote one way or another ... While parental influences on voting likelihood are robust and substantial ..., perceptions of knowledge about the referendum are only improved significantly through discussions in class' (p.351).

Hill, Lockyer, Head and Macdonald (2017) regarded worries that young people would be influenced as to how to vote, as being related to a young person's right to be a child. Ruitenbergh (2009) has noted that teaching about power differentials in society 'is often seen as too "political"' (p.278).

As well as making a case against young people voting in the referendum, a case was made against some secondary schools taking part in the local authority school referendum. The main stated reason put forward by head teachers and others was that campaigners in the referendum might target young people as they went in and out of school (personal knowledge of first author).

Despite these concerns, all the secondary schools in the local authority eventually took part in the school referendum although some did it more wholeheartedly than others, with time out from class to vote rather than simply having ballot boxes accessible in break and lunch time on the day of the school poll. Some schools' lack of engagement or embracing of an opportunity to promote democratic participation is perhaps not surprising given the emphasis on social rather than political citizenship in Scottish education policy documents and the lack of a dedicated citizenship subject (Biesta, 2013).

The fact that our study was situated in schools was a bonus and limitation at the same time. It meant that the young people focused on their political community within school and their (lack of) agency and voice within school but it also meant they did not fully explore the political communities they could be part of out with school.

As referred to above, Mycock (2014) has referred to schools as 'sites of democracy' (p.10) and has called for compulsory electoral registration in schools and colleges. While lowering the voting age 'is not a panacea to issues of youth engagement', and, he suggests, it could even be damaging to youth activism over time. Nevertheless, he argues for compulsory electoral registration (with voluntary participation in voting) as 'a commitment to improve the political knowledge, skills and literacy of young people through citizenship education to enhance understanding of local and national issues and likelihood of voting' (Mycock, 2014, p.12). Berry (2014) is concerned that low participation rates in elections will eventually 'threaten the fundamental legitimacy of democracy' (p.14) and to prevent this, suggests changing how voting is organised in order to take account of how traditional voting practices are no longer in sync with modern lifestyles and young people's work patterns. He is not arguing that voting should be 'easier' but rather 'it has become more difficult for some groups than others' (p.15). Kisby and Sloan (2014) point out how much of the previous institutional 'scaffolding' has disappeared, such as churches, trade unions, and political parties, thus educational institutions play an even more pivotal role in terms of political education (p.53). By reducing the voting age to 16 and educating young people at school about their first opportunity to vote it may be possible to increase electoral participation and provide young people with experience of how their voice can be heard.

## **Conclusion**

With the lowering of the voting age to 16 young people in Scotland have a greater say in wider society but, our research suggests, still have a very small role in how their time at school is organised. Hill et al. (2017) point to the changes over the last fifty years with young people now staying in education for longer, leaving home much later and delaying parenthood, while over the same time period, the voting age has reduced from 21 to 18 and now 16 in Scotland.



Thus, it could be said that as young people in Scotland are 'growing up later', the state is giving them a more 'grown up' role earlier. Feinberg's classification of three types of rights is useful here: universal rights which children share with adults (adult/child or 'ac' rights); rights which only children have because they need protection (child or 'c' rights); and rights which are linked to the age of majority which children, therefore, lack (adult or 'a' rights), for example political rights (Lockyer, 2008, p.25 citing Archard, 2004). In Scotland, young people are gaining more 'a' rights while leading less 'adult' independent lives.

There is general agreement that much higher proportion of young people (18 to 21 year olds) voted in the 2017 UK general election than in other recent UK-wide elections. This has boosted the campaign for a comprehensive reduction in the voting age across the UK for all elections. Further research on the impact of the lowered voting age in the independence referendum and in Scottish parliament and local council elections on under 18s' interest and participation in politics is needed. This research could explore, for example the impact on future habits of participation in electoral politics such as voting, political party membership and candidacy and on other non-party politics forms of engagement such as taking part in legal protest and informal political participation. There are anomalies in terms of the franchise in Scotland and other parts of the UK with 16 and 17 year olds not being able to vote in elections for the UK Parliament. A comparative study of young people's participation in politics in its broadest sense could shed light on the impact of these differences.

Alongside citizenship education for democracy for young people there is also a need for this education for teachers and student teachers. As Ruitenberg (2009) states school pupils 'cannot be taught political literacy ... [nor] political emotions ... nor can they be taught the difference between political, moral, and economic disputes by teachers who do not understand these distinctions themselves' (p.279).

Educating teachers for democracy and education poses an extra challenge in Scotland with the lack of a delineated citizenship subject, no specialist citizenship teachers and the emphasis on social aspects of responsible citizenship across the curriculum. Citizenship and political education, democratic participation by young people in school and beyond and the lowering of the electoral franchise are intertwined and interconnected. As calls grow for all elections in Scotland and the UK to have a minimum voting age of 16 it will be possible to examine if voting rights outside of school influence pupil voice inside school.

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