



Rapid Research Review into Civic Socialisation Amongst Pre- Secondary School Age Children

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Summary

This rapid research review offers oversight of key evidence-based literature exploring civic socialisation amongst pre-secondary school aged children. The dominant themes within this literature suggest that whilst the periods of early and middle childhood are fundamentally important to the civic socialisation of individuals, they are largely overlooked by research, policy and practice, creating a significant gap in our understanding about individuals' civic journey throughout the life-course.

Drawing on some of the emerging research within the UK and beyond we can begin to consider the opportunities and barriers to civic socialisation for pre-secondary aged children. The existing evidence base tells us the civic socialisation of infant and primary school aged children is key both as citizens of today and as future adult citizens. We know increased pro-active civic engagement at a young age leads to propensity to engage in pro-civic behaviours when older, for example social action, volunteering, charitable giving, philanthropy, and democratic participation. However, the research also points to different approaches having greater impact at different stages. For example, storytelling, role-playing and practicing 'civic-ness' in everyday life (such as shared decision-making, critical questioning and thinking, sharing of resources, etc.) within the early and infant years help younger children develop vital political and civic literacies. Whereas experiential, participative, child-led, action-based learning, underpinned by critical thinking and discussions within middle childhood is shown to help children develop as social and political actors within a real-world context.

Although there is some evidence to suggest individual experiential, child-led structured programmes in social action and civic learning are impactful, there is a lack of broader qualitative, quantitative and longitudinal data to draw more conclusive assessment at this point, especially within a UK context. Nonetheless, emerging data suggests, that unlike adolescents who have had wider scale programmes such as the *#iwill* campaign and National Citizens Service, opportunities for children's engagement in civic learning are uncoordinated, unequal and commonly not rooted in evidence-based practice, with children from lower socio-economic areas experiencing fewer opportunities for civic engagement. There is also a significant gap in knowledge concerning programmes and initiatives which connect and cohere as children pass through infant and primary school into secondary education, alongside a lack of understanding about the impact of digital technologies on civic engagement.

In conclusion, this review suggest that young children's civic socialisation should become a research, policy and practice priority.

Introduction

Active civic learning is important in the development of civic socialisation of children (Astuto & Ruck, 2010). It has as a result begun to receive increasing attention from practitioners, policy makers and researchers over recent years. Of particular note has been a focus on ‘high quality social action’, defined ‘as young people taking practical action in the service of others in order to create positive social change that is of benefit to the wider community as well as to the young person themselves’ (Ockenden et al., 2013), which has seen renewed focus on participative social action programmes in schools. The launch of the *#iwill* campaign run by Step Up To Serve in 2013, with cross party support, demonstrated a government commitment to increase social action among the younger generations. This campaign aimed to increase the number of young people aged 10-20 taking part in social action by 50% by 2020. OFSTED (2016) further promoted this idea, highlighting how they perceived such programmes to have positive impacts on academic standards, create high expectations and support better attendance. This notion was then further strengthened by research from the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues which suggested young people who were first involved in youth social action before the age of 10 are more than twice as likely to have an ongoing commitment to social action (a ‘habit of service’) than those who first participate after the age of 16 (Arthur et al., 2017; Taylor-Collins et al., 2019). Nonetheless, whilst early years and primary education is mentioned in passing in much of the literature; focus, both from research and practice, has heavily favoured adolescents, often overlooking the role of civic learning in early and middle childhood (pre-secondary school). This research review aims to begin to address that gap.

In September 2021 *The Civic Journey* project was launched. Against a backdrop of increasing evidence concerning social polarisation and community fragmentation the project focuses on illuminating and unleashing the civic potential of young people to reinvigorate communities, identify innovative solutions to local problems and to invigorate the ties that bind individuals and groups together in a manner that celebrates diversity and difference. As part of this project, and in acknowledgement of the gap in the research and literature, the Institute for Community Studies commissioned this rapid research review into civic socialisation amongst pre-secondary school age children. The aim of this work is to synthesise the existing research base in a succinct, accurate and evidence-based manner. The primary focus of this review will be on infants and primary school age children in England, but a broader range of insights are included where relevant.

Objectives

The objective of this review is to carry out a comprehensive appraisal of the research and evidence related to the civic socialisation of pre-secondary school age children in the UK. Within this context

the concept childhood is understood as central in understanding the civic journey both in terms of transitions to early adulthood and also the process of civic socialisation.

The rapid research review focuses on four key parts:

- Approaches to and the argument for a focus on early and middle childhood as an important aspect within an individual's civic journey.
- What we know about the spaces, places and structured programmes within which civic learning takes place.
- Recognising children's evolving capacities for civic engagement.
- Consideration of the barriers, future research, recommendations and policy implications.

To ensure the rapid research review is comprehensive in its coverage of existing research, a search strategy was developed, including identification of key words (such as civic learning, service learning, citizenship education, children, primary education, etc). Snowball sampling of identified studies, including citations and citing articles were then followed up. Abstracts were reviewed to ensure studies focused wholly or mainly upon children under the age of 11 years old. Regarding the grey literature, a targeted internet search of relevant interventions was carried out by manually searching websites of organisations involved in child-led social action. Initially the review focused on studies within the geographical area of England and the UK, however due to the small number of studies identified the review expanded to an international search, noting where studies are reporting on outcomes outside of the UK context. Due to the nature of the topic, the review has adopted a multi-disciplinary approach. The review does not aim to be systematic or exhaustive, but instead aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of pre-secondary school aged civic socialisation. The final list of studies selected includes 111 academic papers and studies published after 2000, focusing on children aged 0-11 years old.

Part 1: Context of Childhood Civic Socialisation

Approaches to Engaging Children in Civic Learning

Before we venture too far into the literature review it is important to address what 'type' of programmes are used to encourage civic socialisation. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) described three models of citizenship and civic engagement for children and young people. The personally responsible citizen follows community laws and possesses personality characteristics such as honesty, reliability, empathy, compassion, and self-discipline. The participatory citizen is an active member of civic, social, or community organizations or movements that work for community enhancement. The justice-oriented citizen possesses an understanding of the processes systemic, social, cultural, economic, and political forces as they impact community life and social problems; critically analyses social problems and injustices; and considers collective strategies to address root problems of social ills (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Westheimer (2015) argues that school programmes which hope to develop the personally responsible citizen, which are often framed within a 'character education' framework, often fail in increasing children's participation in local and national civic life. Equally, Westheimer's qualitative and quantitative data shows that programmes that emphasise the participatory citizenship, do not necessarily develop children's skills to critique root causes of social problems. Whilst programmes which focus on critiquing the root causes of social problems, without participatory involvement, are unlikely to increase civic engagement. Nonetheless, the choices schools and communities make about the type of programme offered to children have real and lasting consequences for the type of society we create and thus require our attention (Body et al., 2021; Body & Lacny, 2022).

A focus on civic engagement through the lens of the personally responsible and participatory citizen dominates practice-based literature in the UK, largely fuelled by the evaluation of the *#iwill* campaign and work undertaken by the Jubilee Centre (Arthur et al., 2017; Kirkman et al., 2016; Kisby, 2017; Lamb et al., 2019). These programmes have appeared effective in terms of encouraging 'habits of service' (Arthur et al., 2017). For example, studies such as Kirkman et al (2016) highlight, using randomised controlled trials, that children and young people in the UK who take part in social action initiatives display significant improvements in their skills for work and life, alongside increased interest in future volunteering when compared to 'non-treated' groups. Further afield, Brown et al's (2022) US focused meta-analysis of character education programmes, funded by The John Templeton Foundation, who remain strong advocates and philanthropic supporters of character education (Allen & Bull, 2018), conclude similar positive effects of character education. Nonetheless, there are significant critiques levelled at character education approaches, the central theme of these

critiques is that ‘they leave the burden of responsibility for particular social outcomes in life and the labour market with individuals and their ability to cultivate their own human capital’ (Taylor, 2018: p.399), rather than focus on human and societal flourishing (Kisby, 2017). Furthermore, Brown et al’s (2022) meta-analysis notes multiple issues in reporting on outcomes of character education programmes, particularly in terms of selection bias in published literature – potentially suggesting the weight of evidence supporting character education is not quite as strong as suggested in policy narratives. Additionally Jaynes (2019) meta-analysis of the impacts of 52 character education research projects suggests that character education has significantly less impact on young, pre-secondary aged children than their older peers. Indeed, scholars within character education have acknowledged the potential shortcomings of a purely ‘character’ focused approach to civic learning ‘particularly as it has been applied recently by proponents who take a more individualistic approach to moral and political issues’ (Lamb et al., 2019: p.144). Nonetheless, most scholars recognise the notions of character as necessary, though not always fully sufficient as a standalone approach, in encouraging civic learning, with several calling for the integration of character and citizenship education to support children and young people’s civic engagement (Body & Lacny, 2022; Lamb et al., 2019; Peterson, 2019 etc). As Peterson (2019) suggests, engagement in communities and deliberation with others is central to developing individual character virtues, alongside recognising and challenging structural injustices.

Many scholars have noted the lack of statutory status of citizenship education as a requirement of the national curriculum in primary education (Mills, 2021), which can be considered illogical when, as Weinberg (2021) suggests, children are citizens from birth, not the age of 18, and that children are faced with sensitive political issues much earlier in their lives than secondary school. Tarozzi and Inguaggiato (2018) comparative analysis of educational policy in ten different countries, including England, suggest, in the case of England that ‘a change of government from progressive to conservative has resulted in a sudden interruption of educational policies that previously have been promoting the introduction of global citizenship education-related areas’ (p.34). In response multiple actors have called for greater policy and practice focus on citizenship within the pre-secondary school aged years (e.g. Body et al., 2020; Farini; 2019), with others highlighting the need for specialist training and support for teachers who teach citizenship within the classroom (Osler & Starkey, 2018; Pontes, 2019). Nevertheless, this literature review highlights that there is limited literature on the lack of provision of citizenship education at the primary level and also the lack of literature that seeks to connect this with secondary phase education, suggesting a significant gap in our understanding.

Children's Rights

Internationally children's rights and agency are consistently identified in the literature as crucial in supporting children develop civic behaviours (Jerome & Starkey, 2022), alongside recognising the importance of the teacher, parents and community organisations in supporting children to consciously develop this agency (Eidhof & de Ruttyer, 2022; Fitzgerald, 2021; Haggstrom, 2022; Jerome & Starkey, 2022).

Ratified by the UK in 1991, The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) sets out the human rights of every person under the age of 18. It was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and is the most widely adopted international human rights treaty in history. Articles 12 and 13 in particular seek to ensure children's views are respected and that all children are given the freedom to express their views, put simply, this is to be understood as a child's right to be consulted and listened to in matters that affect their life (Nolas, 2016). According to Freeman, Article 12 is particularly significant 'not only for what it says, but because it recognises the child as a full human being with integrity and personality and the ability to participate freely in society' (Freeman, 1996: 37).

Jerome and Starkey (2021) explore children's rights education within contemporary society. They argue that to adopt a children's right approach in education children must be able to engage in tensions from the community, 'to wrestle with real problems' and 'connect individual experiences and concerns to broader social just principles' (Jerome & Starkey, 2021). Although there is acknowledged progress in the research and development of participatory tools since the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Nolas, 2016), according to a significant number of studies, children's participation and agency is still relatively poorly understood and poorly practiced, meaning they continue to face multiple barriers to meaningful participation (e.g. Children in a Changing Climate, 2016; Cuevas-Parra, 2021; Kylin & Stina, 2017; Lansdown, 2019). This continued exclusion of children's voices perpetuates the cycle of marginalization of children. Such barriers are acknowledged by The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) who have identified multiple challenges to implementing Article 12 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and children's participation in general in society, particularly for marginalized and disadvantaged groups of children. General Comment No. 12: The Right of the Child to be Heard mention several notable factors, including discrimination, long-standing practices, attitudes, legal, political, economic, social, environmental, and cultural barriers (UNCRC 2009; UN General Assembly 2017). The Convention on the Rights of the Child suggests that for children to be heard, approaches should be meaningful and avoid tokenistic methods, with participation recognised as an ongoing and evolving process (UNCRC 2009). Reviewing 30 years of policy and practice since the UNCRC, Lansdown (2019) suggests that

too many children are still denied the right to influence the most basic decisions, including those within education. As Lundy and McEvoy (2012) suggest, the implementation of Article 12 is problematic as it requires cooperation from adults who commonly dispute children's entitlement to agency and therefore limit children and young people's use and understanding of their rights. Indeed considering this within civic engagement, Body et al (2021) draw on the example of fundraising practices within primary schools in England presenting evidence that popular, largescale fundraising appeals in schools often fail to recognise children as capable, current citizens who have the right to actively participate in decision making processes which affect them, as enshrined in the UNCR, and therefore directly contravene children's rights, in favour of tokenistic fundraising activities. This suggests there is still much work to be done in the recognition of children's rights within civic learning activities.

The Argument for a Focus on Pre-Secondary Aged Children's Civic (and Political) Socialisation

The existing evidence base tells us that the civic socialisation of pre-secondary school aged children is vital both in terms as citizens of today and future adult citizens.

While there is a broad and substantial literature on adolescent and adult civic engagement (Barrett & Pachi, 2019) it is widely acknowledged that there is a general lack of research and evidence-based literature relating to children's civic socialisation and learning, especially within the context of England and the wider UK. Conversely however, educational, social and psychology theory and research consistently highlights middle childhood and the primary school years (ages 4–11 years) as crucial in the development and normalisation of civic behaviours (e.g., Arthur et al., 2017; Duong & Bradshaw, 2017; Housman et al., 2018; Taylor-Collins et al., 2019 van Deth et al., 2011; Wörle & Paulus, 2018). This mis-match is concerning and calls for urgent attention to be paid to pre-secondary school aged children's civic socialisation.

There are multiple studies which highlight the early and pre-secondary school years as at least equally important in cultivating children's civic behaviours as secondary and higher education. Within the earliest stages of childhood, considered here as the first five years, researchers tend to agree that the brain undergoes faster growth than any other period in life (Organisation for the Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019), thus this period is important in learning and development (Schleicher 2019; Spiteri 2020; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2020). Warneken & Tomasello (2009) experimental study with children aged 14 to 18 months suggests that even from this young age, children are naturally altruistic seeking to help others, irrespective of reward, achieve their goals. They propose that 'children start out as rather indiscriminate altruists

who become more selective as they grow older' (p.466). There are also several socio-cognitive and socio-emotional factors that support the development and display of these prosocial, civic behaviours. An increasing number of psychology researchers have highlighted the underlying mechanism of emotions, like empathy, sympathy and guilt, and cognitive developments such as perspective taking, in children's pro-sociality and civic-ness (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2006; Sierksma et al., 2014). Whereas several studies highlight that without pro-active engagement in civic learning children are already constructing discriminatory and prejudiced world-views from a young age (Oberman et al., 2012; Ramsey 2008). Relatedly, psychological research and child development theories provide evidence that children's empathy, sympathy and perspective taking skills, develop from around 4 years of age and increase with encouragement, becoming more advanced over the course of middle childhood (Ongley et al., 2014; Weller & Lagattuta, 2013).

Moving into primary school years, whilst limited, research suggests children are keen to engage in philanthropic and civic behaviours (Body et al., 2020; Lau & Body, 2021; Power & Smith, 2016). Worle and Paulus (2018) investigating children's normative expectations through experiments testing their assumptions around the fair distribution of resources, found ideas of charity and giving a deeply rooted norm within children aged 3 to 6 years old, with the older children (5-6 year olds) particularly active in seeking fair distribution of resources, prioritising gifting resources to those in the experiment who were considered to be less wealthy. Such findings are echoed by others. For example Paulus and Moore (2012) suggest prosocial behaviours, that is behaviours that are intended to help others, such as comforting and helping are displayed early in life, and the frequency and the complexity of these behaviours, increases during the primary school years; whilst studies looking at sharing tendencies have shown that 3-4- and 7-8-year-olds are willing to share things such as toys and food, however the number of children who share and the number of resources they give increases with age (Fehr et al., 2008). Furthermore, research in the UK with young adolescents, including those at the upper end of primary school age, reveals they are positive about charity, with high expectations of charities and civic action to solve social ills (CAF, 2013; Power & Taylor, 2018).

In addition, when it comes to political literacy multiple studies highlight younger children as politically knowledgeable (Abendschon & Tausendpfund, 2017; Gotzmann, 2015; van Deth et al., 2011). Van Deth et al's (2011) panel study of 700 children in Germany in their first year of school (age 6-7 years) suggest several important findings which are likely to resonate across similar educational contexts and challenges the conventional wisdom that adolescence is where children and young people gain political orientations and competencies. Their study suggests that these political and social orientations are formed much earlier and that young children are capable of

expressing political opinions and attitudes, displaying key basic political knowledge and orientations which are considered to be prerequisites of political involvement and participation, highlighting the middle childhood period between the ages of 4–11 as a critical age for civic learning (Dias & Menezes, 2014).

Part 2: Places and Spaces

The Importance of School

Schools are often considered one of the best places to reach younger populations to foster civic engagement by the simple virtue that most children and adolescents attend school (CAF, 2013; Barrett & Pachi, 2019; Hogg & De Vries, 2018; Peterson et al., 2021), and thus the role of civic learning programmes within schools has come under increasing scrutiny within the literature. Schools, particularly those supporting the primary and early years are often the first institutional experience for children in which they must work alongside others outside their families and immediate communities (Payne et al., 2020). The *Civic Action and Young Children Study* is an international comparative, video-cued ethnographic study examining how young children, from marginalised communities, aged 3 to 5 years old, acted civically on behalf of their communities. The authors of this study (Payne et al., 2020) argue that attending to such forms of civic action can support schools to cultivate more inclusive forms of participation and visions of the common good. Through this study the authors argue that children are enacting their civic-ness every day, through establishing community through shared practices, sharing care and concern for others and connecting to comparative contexts; and as a result, schools need to afford more opportunities for children to experience civic-ness. Importantly the researchers conclude, that when classrooms and teachers afford young children more agency, children’s civic capabilities expand, and they can act on behalf of and with their community. Rather than teaching children about democracy and citizenship, they call for an embodied, lived experience for young children. Additionally, Swalwell and Payne (2019) advocate for ‘educators to help young children develop (a) a general understanding of current injustices (along with root causes) within their communities, (b) the ability to articulate and reflect on their own conception of an ideal society that advances human flourishing, and (c) strategies to advance their ideas.’

Within school-based studies experiential, active learning is consistently highlighted as an important part of civic learning. Multiple studies highlight that whilst hearing and talking about civic issues, such as equality, environmentalism, poverty, etc, may heighten awareness, it has little association with children’s civic engagement; whereas the use of participative civic learning activities in the classroom, such as service learning experiences, community service, hearing from civic role models, political stimulation activities in the classroom (such as student council elections), role play and story-telling all positively contribute to children’s civic engagement (Body et al., 2020; Brownlee et al., 2019; Payne et al., 2020; Torres-Harding et al., 2018; Westheimer, 2015; White & Mistry, 2019).

Eidhof and De Ruyter (2022) advocate for the role of schools in encouraging children's self-efficacy within democratic citizenship education. Drawing on a conceptual review of self-efficacy in the classroom, they highlight the need for citizenship education to involve activities outside the school in local communities or engagement in political activities at national level, for example, engagement in community service-learning projects. Nonetheless, they recognise the challenges faced by many educators in balancing some student's anti-democratic views, often rooted in family traditions or cultures, and promotion of democratic, justice orientated education. Here they argue teachers should seek to promote neutral politics whilst encouraging students to critically explore their own beliefs.

Torres-Harding et al's., (2018) US based focus group study with 32 children aged 5-14 years examining their experiences of participating in grassroots campaigns found that even the youngest children developed socio-political awareness and critical consciousness through the combination of active participation and using these experiences to challenge social issues such as oppression, power, and discrimination. Their findings suggest that children can acknowledge and understand how power differentials and inequalities contribute to their own lives and their communities. Furthermore, in facilitating children to develop their decision-making capacities, to act, and to reflect on their own social change efforts, with support from adults, Torres-Harding et al (2018) suggest ultimately leads to many positive outcomes for youth engaged in social action projects and can positively benefit their community. In conclusion they advocate for children's engagement as social change agents within a school-based, social justice-oriented school curriculum (p.16).

Several scholars highlight schools as an important space within which children often first engage with notions of charity, giving and voluntary action (Body et al., 2020; Power & Taylor, 2017; Silke et al., 2018; Simpson, 2017). Research highlights that schools provide a vital space for the development of philanthropic behaviours, within which almost all children are engaged in one way or another in giving to charity through their time, advocacy, or resources (CAF, 2013; Silke et al., 2018; Power & Taylor, 2018). Body and colleagues have also explored civic learning in primary schools in England through the notion of philanthropic citizenship, which they define as a dimension of citizenship behaviour, associated with intentions and actions that intend to produce social and/or environmental benefits for example volunteering, social action, charitable giving, advocacy, and activism (Body, 2021). They, and others, find that encouraging philanthropic acts, such as giving to charity, volunteering, and social action, has become increasingly mainstream in education and more broadly in society (Body et al., 2020; Power and Taylor, 2018). Research by Body et al., (2020) working with 150 primary school children in the UK, highlighted that parent, schools and

communities often go to great lengths to encourage, support, and engage children of all ages in philanthropy and charitable giving, creating a strong enthusiasm for supporting others. However, they found that less than 20% of the children had any meaningful engagement in decisions about which charities they supported and even less were aware of the cause they were supporting. Following six weeks of participative active research with children, where the children were encouraged and facilitated to lead on researching charities, they found just over 33% of the children chose to undertake charitable activities, fundraising and giving, of their own volition even after the facilitated support had ended. This prompted calls for greater emphasis not just on teaching children to be civically engaged, but on how schools and communities engage children in conversations concerning civic engagement as active citizens (Body et al., 2021; Simpson, 2017; Westheimer, 2015). Body et al. (2020) argue that civic opportunities should be used to help children challenge and come to their own views of charity and associated virtues, rather than simply training them to be 'good citizens'. The researchers urge teachers and other facilitators to move away from encouraging transactional engagement and neutral consensus attitudes even at an early age, and instead nurture children's voices within the debates and complexities of charity and giving (Body et al., 2020). Additionally, Culhane and McGeough (2020) through case study examination of human rights education in schools in England propose that bottom-up, school-led charity events, as opposed to top-down large campaigns, can provide vital learning spaces for human rights education.

Extending this research, early findings from a nationwide research project in England, representing almost 2,000 primary school teacher's voices via surveys, indicates that there is significant disparity in the types of civic engagement opportunities available for children within primary school settings, dependent upon socio-economic factors, ethnicity and teachers own civic behaviours (Body et al., 2022). Children within schools which are predominantly white, within areas of wealth and with teachers who are civically engaged themselves, are more likely to have access to civic engagement opportunities, including engagement in community projects, social action, and volunteering. Furthermore, the research suggests civic socialisation across primary schools is more commonly framed within an individual, personally responsible discourse rather than connected to ideas of social justice and collective action (Westheimer, 2015). There is also a significant link between teachers' civic participation and the civic activities they encourage in the classroom, with more civically engaged teachers more likely to encourage children to critically consider their civic actions and encourage active civic engagement activities such as social action and campaigning. Finally, teachers face multiple moral dilemmas in the classroom in engaging children in civic conversations, including concerns about tensions between parental values, school values and children's lived

experiences, thus over 90% of primary school teachers will avoid discussions around some civic focused topics, such as poverty, climate change and homelessness (Body, 2022).

Such findings are supported by the RSA's *Citizens of Now* (Tejani & Breeze, 2021) report which details the evaluation of a three year long project working with nine primary schools in the West Midlands, England, between 2018 and 2021, engaging a total of 519 year 4 pupils to deliver youth social action programmes within a primary school context. They concluded that children (aged 8-9 years) derive direct benefits from participating in social action, developing leadership, teamwork, problem-solving, and communication skills, as well as a sense of social responsibility and civic self-efficacy. Focusing on Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) personally responsible and participative citizenship engagement, less is known about the wider community impacts of this action.

Conducting a survey of almost 2000 teachers as part of this project revealed that most teachers and headteachers believe in the importance of youth social action during the primary phase of education, nonetheless, schools located in the most deprived areas have fewer opportunities to take part in social action projects. Equally this project highlighted significant barriers to engagement. The survey revealed a significant socioeconomic gap in how schools' engage with youth social action; just 27% of primary teachers in schools with above the national average % of free school meal (FSM) pupil populations said youth social action is embedded in their practice compared with 57% of primary teachers in schools with below national average % of FSM pupil populations.

Engagement in social action has also been linked to positive attainment. Conducting a meta-analysis of US social and emotional programmes which included community learning, Durlak et al., (2011) found that social and emotional skills, attitudes, and behaviour demonstrated an 11th percentile point gain in academic achievement. Furthermore, they found character qualities such as self-regulation, perseverance and 'love of learning' were all closely correlated with school success as well as perspective, gratitude, hope and teamwork. They also found that engagement in such programmes increased likelihood of reporting positive relationships with teachers and peers, suggesting such activities improve interpersonal connections and personal development.

The Family

Alongside the role of schools, evidence suggests the family and community play a crucial role in the civic socialisation of pre-secondary school aged children, especially when it comes to encouraging volunteering, philanthropy, political literacy, and democratic participation. Research consistently shows the importance of parents, and wider family members such as siblings, and grandparents in passing on civic values, attitudes and behaviours that promote and encourage, or indeed discourage,

helping others, civic engagement, and pro-social civic attitudes (Wiepking & Bekkers, 2007; Taylor-Collins et al, 2019).

Overall, however there has been very little research which has focused on the volunteering activities of primary school aged children, mainly due to largescale volunteering data rarely capturing this information and a general lack of acknowledgement of children as volunteers in their own right; and if listed at all just considered as part of a family group. Nonetheless, the limited data that does exist suggest children are a valuable and important part of the voluntary sector. Sarre and Tarling (2010) analysis of the UK Time Use Survey 2000 explored the formal and informal volunteering of children aged 8 to 15, concluding that whilst children’s volunteering made up a good proportion of the formal and informal volunteering hours in the UK, their contribution was often overlooked or not recorded due to age. They also found that gender and ethnicity have far greater impacts on children’s formal volunteering than they do on adults. Additional research finds that parental civic behaviours are positively associated with that of their children’s, for example parental volunteering leads to increased likelihood of children volunteering (Bekkers, 2007; Grimm et al., 2005; Perks & Knoecny, 2015), with a similar pattern also found in community activism (Janoski & Wilson, 1995). Thus, family, and particularly parents, have a strong influence on their children’s civic engagement. This influence can be positive or negative, with distress in parental relationships or separation of parents evidenced as having negative impact on children’s current and future likelihood of civic engagement, alongside children experiencing poverty (Ottoni-Wilhelm & Bandy, 2013; Voorpostel & Coffe, 2015).

Furthermore, multiple UK based studies identify the importance of family volunteering opportunities as pathways into civic participation for children (Brodie et al., 2011; Ellis-Paine et al., 2020), however, conversely, more recent analysis of the United Kingdom Time Use Survey (UKTUS) 2014–15 highlights that families with children aged 5-10 years old are the least likely to formally volunteer, suggesting barriers to family volunteering at organisational level (Kamerade, 2022). Whereas Muddiman et al’s intergenerational study of civic behaviours within the family found several connections between the family culture and civil society, such as the role of family meals, events, and arguments in children’s nurturing civic engagement; the family’s role in the transmission of religion was also argued as strongly linked to civic engagement (Nesbit 2012; Vermeer & Scheepers, 2012); and the reproduction of gendered norms such as the, often, invisible caring work done mostly by women in a family (Muddiman et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, research tells us parental civic behaviours and attitudes matter to children’s civic participation. In the US, White’s (2021) study of 349, 4th to 6th grade children in California (9 – 11yrs) showed that children with a greater sense of community responsibility were more likely to

volunteer. Additionally, parents who more strongly endorsed humanitarian-egalitarian values and those with greater civic participation were more likely to have children who volunteered, even after controlling for child and family background variables. This suggests parent values and civic participation, and children's own beliefs about social responsibility contribute to children's civic participation. An earlier study by White (White & Mistry, 2016), drawing on the same dataset, demonstrated that parent's sense of social trust, civic efficacy and civic participation are also associated with children's civic dispositions.

Parents and carers are also influential in children's propensity to give. Ottoni Wilhelm et al's (2017) quantitative research based in the US suggests that parents talking to children about charity and charitable giving increases their propensity to give. Similarly, Ben-ner et al. (2017) who find parents modelling sharing behaviours positively influence young children's (3-5 years) sharing habits, encouraging increased generosity. Meanwhile Duong and Bradshaw's (2017) study of 2,400 elementary school students in the US, in Grade 3 to 5 (8 to 10yrs) demonstrated the impact of positive parenting on children's empathy, alongside concerns about negative impacts experienced when children are exposed to higher levels of community risk and from areas of lower sociodemographic.

Therefore, it is perhaps important to consider if we wish to support civic learning opportunities among preadolescences, engagement of parents/ carers and the family will only strengthen this endeavour.

Community Programmes

Several US studies point to the importance of community led programmes in increasing and cultivating pre-secondary school children's civic participation (Zarrett et al., 2021), however the outcomes for children's civic mindedness are mixed. For example, in the US engagement in scouting during the pre-secondary school years is positively associated with four indicators of civic engagement as an adult: community involvement, community volunteering, community activism, and environmental activism (Kim et al., 2016). Nonetheless, among a cross-sectional sample of boys ages 6 to 11 who participated in US Cub Scouts, Champine et al., (2016) failed to find associations between either intensity or breadth with children's helpfulness, kindness, and trustworthiness. Similarly in a sample of 1,398 Boy Scouts (average age 9 years old), Wang et al. (2015) found that scouts' self-ratings increased significantly for helpfulness compared with non-scouts, but not for kindness or trustworthiness over a two-and-a-half-year period. Equally in a qualitative study on sports programs (Holt et al. 2012), upper primary-school aged children reported learning about empathy and prosocial moral and civic behaviours. Whereas in another study on children of a similar

age group researchers found that children's self-reported moral and civic behaviour was not associated with the number of hours they spent in either sports or non-sport activities (Villarreal & Gonzalez 2016). However, Kataoka and Vandell (2013) found that the overall quality of the activities is a significant factor in predicting children's outcomes of community based civic engagement. Specifically, they point to quality indicators such as the levels of leader support, positive peer relationships and perceived child-led autonomy as the strongest predictors of positive moral and civic behaviours. This is further supported by Lynch et al's (2016) study on pre-secondary school aged scouts, which indicated high levels of autonomy, emotional and cognitive engagement in activities led to the greatest increases in prosocial moral and civic behaviours.

Similarly, within a UK context Tyler-Rubenstein et al. (2016) through case study analysis highlights the importance of uniformed groups in engaging children in social action, whilst Birdwell et al. (2013) suggest such activities offer key spaces for cultivating younger children's civic engagement. Furthermore, several studies highlight the positive impact of engaging children as agents of change within their communities as an important part of civic life. Percy-Smith and Burns (2012) through participatory research with children, suggest that central to promoting the increasing role of children as agents of change in communities is the provision of spaces which are not always controlled by adults or defined adult agendas, but which also provide opportunities for children to take action in response to issues they feel passionate about. Similarly, Nicottera's (2008) participatory action research study in which children were actively engaged in community planning processes, demonstrated statistically significant changes in children's civic engagement, awareness and civic skills, such as assessing strengths and weaknesses of community projects and actions.

Whilst UK academic peer reviewed literature on children's civic learning journeys within a UK context is still an evolving field, there are several notable civil society organisations within the UK, such as The RSA, The Linking Network, People United, Young Citizens, ACT, and First Give, which seek to work with schools and communities to encourage younger children's civic learning. Evaluation of these programmes, though mixed in depth and quality, reveals some interesting topics for policy and practice consideration. For example, The Linking Network, a charity which seeks to develop and deepen children's knowledge and understanding of identity, diversity, equality and community, working across 29 Local Authority Areas and impacting over 200,000 children (Linking Network, 2022), programme evaluation (Cameron, 2020) suggests that creating space in the classroom for children to meet, discuss and engage in social action projects with children from diverse backgrounds, has significant impact on increasing interpersonal relationships between children from different communities, particularly among those in Years 3 and 4 (ages 6-8 years). Similarly, People

United (2017), a Kent based charity, use participative arts as a method of engaging children in social change. Evaluation of their programme across ten years of delivery suggests participatory arts projects and creative interventions have increased children's empathy and motivations to help, share with and care for others. Nonetheless, research also identifies significant barriers for children to engage in community volunteering programmes, with their age presenting a particular barrier due to safe-guarding and capability concerns for voluntary sector organisations (Ellis-Paine et al., 2020; Stuart, 2019). Thus, children's civic participation is often limited to set community or school programmes, partly due to a lack of recognition of children as full, current citizens within wider society.

Online and Digital Communities

There has been growing interest considering the role of digital communities contributing to children's civic learning, nonetheless this remains an emerging area of research particularly among younger children. US based Raphael et al. (2010) developed a framework suggesting an agenda for game design and research that could illuminate whether and how games can be most fruitfully incorporated into training and education for democratic citizenship and civic leadership. Building on this, research highlights that when children play games with civic content they are more likely to become involved in civic engagement within their own communities (Lamarra et al., 2019). Aura et al's (2022) systematic literature review reported positive impact of gamification on learning in the context of civic education as well as positive impact on cognitive, emotional, motivational and social experiences and motivation. However, they also identified that the lack of detailed descriptions of the exact attributes that facilitated these favourable shifts indicates a need for more systematic research to identify the long-term and transferable influence game-based approaches have on formal civic education and students' civic skills.

A recent study of children's digital literacies in Scotland, found that when children engaged with online characters, they were able to discuss and consider different perspectives and points of view (Martzoukou, 2020). In response to the growing interest in online learning, The UK Council For child Internet safety (UKCCIS) working group developed a framework "Education for a Connected World" which can be used as a tool for developing teaching and learning activities for children. The framework focuses on eight different strands of online connectivity and describes different levels of skills which highlight what a child should know and what skills they require to develop: (1) Self-image and identity, (2) Online relationships, (3) Online reputation, (4) Online bullying, (5) Managing online information, (6) Health, well-being and lifestyle, (7) Privacy and security, (8) Copyright and ownership. Multiple studies identify this scaffolding approach as useful in terms of engaging children

in digital civic learning (Livingstone et al., 2019; Martzoukou, 2020; UKCCIS, 2018) encouraging a progression of online activities that children engage in. The progression allows them to move up to activities which encourage more complex thinking, meaning they engage in the easiest and most accessible digital civic learning first such as watching a video or interacting with others online, working up to more complex engagements such as online civic engagement or involvement “in a campaign or protest” (UKCCIS, 2018).

Part 3: Responding to the Evolving Capacities of Younger Children

Developing Civic Literacy

One of the more dominant threads within the literature is children's evolving capacities and development. This is particularly important within the early years and pre-adolescence as children's moral development rapidly evolves, thus within early childhood there is much focus on developing children's civic mindedness in situ rather than ask them to dwell on ideas which may have little bearing on their lived experiences (Hauver, 2019). Thus, researchers focus on aspects such as developing critical consciousness and development of cognitive capabilities through shared decision making in ways which are accessible and familiar to younger children. Scott and Graham (2015) examined service-learning outcomes for children aged 5 to 6 years old, and 10 to 11 years old. They found such activity only increased civic efficacy among the older children. They concluded this was largely due to the complexity of this concept which requires knowledge of civic duties and responsibilities and is a construct that may not be developmentally appropriate for the younger children, as they are likely less able to visualise how civic efficacy works. This raises questions about the types of civic activities children engage in at different ages. Research points to empirical evidence that younger children, through engagement in play, can develop their civic and political literacies, responding to fairness with social justice-oriented solutions by giving up their own resources, prioritizing other's needs, and advocating for others (Lee et al., 2021). Lee et al (2021) advocate for teachers to provide children with spaces and freedom to 'play out' scenarios of fairness and justice, recognising their legitimate role as contributors to the classroom community, testing and evolving their ideas of debate and critical consciousness in safe and supportive places. Fitzgerald (2021) study of 160 children across six primary schools in Ireland, highlights the importance of social bonding and development of positive interpersonal skills in enabling children to actively participate in collective social action, asserting that social bonding is a prerequisite for developing democratic practice between children and adults (p.12).

Nonetheless, civic literacy is not evenly dispersed. Whilst van Deth et al's 2011 study highlights the strength of children's civic and political literacy pre-adolescence, they also find that even at this earliest stage 'the basic requirements for political involvement such as political knowledge, competences, and normative orientations are far from equally distributed' (p.166). Children from ethnic minorities and lower socioeconomic areas show relatively less developed political orientations, and they do not improve as much over the school year as other children. This suggests that current forms of civic education within this context 'does not appear to level the playing field' (p.166). Such findings are supported by others such as Abendschon and Tausendpfund (2017) who

also highlight gender-based differences in civic and political knowledge, with girls generally displaying significantly lower levels of political knowledge than boys.

Storytelling

Storytelling and role play has long been recognised as an important aspect of children's moral and prosocial learning and development, especially amongst younger children (Arthur et al., 2015a; Aksoy & Baran, 2020; Carr & Harrison, 2017; Kidd & Castano, 2013; Phillips, 2011). Multiple research studies highlight how children's stories can inspire children to perform more prosocial behaviours (e.g. Larsen et al., 2018). Nussbaum (1998) points to the importance of children's stories in developing children's moral capacities, and while she acknowledges that literature cannot 'transform society single-handed' (p. 94) stories can provide experiences which cultivate 'at least a beginning of social justice' (p. 94). Likewise, the power of storytelling to cultivate kind and compassionate behaviours is widely promoted throughout education and citizenship literature (e.g. Kidd, 2020; Peterson, 2016). Research suggests stories which contain accessible, more ordinary, human, rather than animalistic (Larsen et al., 2018) or extraordinary type figures, who children can easily identify with (Han et al., 2017; Klein & O'Brien, 2017) are particularly powerful in promoting young children's prosocial behaviour.

Nussbaum (1998) specifically investigates the role of literature in developing children's civic responsibilities and global citizenship. She points out a positive causal relationship between the development of children's morality and literature, arguing that the arts, can support us not only to understand and be motivated to participate morally, but also enables us to put that into practice in our own conduct and decision-making. According to Nussbaum, the narrative imagination that is developed through storytelling and literature, is essential preparation for moral interaction and has a vital role in helping children develop their civic socialisation from a young age.

Accordingly, multiple studies have highlighted the importance of storytelling (Body & Lacny, 2022; Häggström, 2022) and the arts (Varquez-Martin et al., 2022) in encouraging younger children's critical thinking and supporting the development of children's civic socialisation. Within the classroom, as Häggström (2022) highlights in their participant observation study of 49, 8-9 year old children in Swedish primary school, teachers' scaffolding is essential in these processes, requiring a well-educated, compassionate, and skilled teacher, and conscious consideration relating to children's agency facilitating them to practice arguing, negotiation and reaching agreement about civic matters. Whilst Aurélio et al's (2021) empirical study with 176, 8-10-year-old children in

Portugal highlighted the potential of carefully selected children's story books in cultivating environmental awareness and action. Body and Lacny (2022) also call for careful consideration of which stories are used when engaging children in civic learning. Their critical content analysis of over 100 western children's picture-books which contained aspects of voluntary action revealed that the majority of children's contemporary literature frames voluntary action as an individual act of personal responsibility which takes place in the private sphere, focusing on singular acts of kindness and generosity, overlooking connections between the cause and wider societal socioeconomic, political, environmental and/or social justice issues. Furthermore, they suggest many stories reinforce concerning paternalistic, problematic and negative stereotypical ideas of gender, race and power within philanthropy and voluntary action, encouraging a 'politics of benevolence' (Jefferess, 2008) among younger children. Such findings are echoed by Patterson (2019) in relation to children's picture books and political socialisation, calling out the missed opportunities within literature for many aspects of political and civic socialisation.

Environmental Concerns

Perhaps the most global example of children's civic agency in action is through children's participation in the climate change movement and Schools Strikes for Climate Change, a movement started by the then 15-year-old Greta Thunberg in 2018. Narrative surrounding children's participation in these events have been illuminating in terms of societal approaches and framing of children's social action. Arguably, children, though denied any formal recognition of political agency and voice, are at the forefront of crafting these narratives through taking action (Alexandra et al., 2021; Catanzaro & Collin, 2021).

Spiteri's (2021) research project exploring young children, aged 3-7, views on environmental concerns revealed that young children have some understanding of the need for environmental protection and are able and capable of engaging in meaningful discussions with adults. Indeed, Spiteri's work highlights that children's reasons for protecting the environment are constructed from an early age, nonetheless, these reasons as situationally influenced, including when children hold misconceptions. Body et al. (2020) found similar findings in that without appropriately designed programmes in the early years and primary education where children can discuss environmental and societal concerns in age-appropriate ways, misconceptions remained unchallenged. They conclude that offering meaningful opportunities in early and middle childhood for children to actively and critically engage in issues, may lead to a more sustainable and just future.

Part 4: Moving Forwards

Summary of Themes

The rapid research review suggests that like civic engagement opportunities for adolescents, socioeconomic background can dictate the relationship between civic actions, children's engagement and outcomes. Children from more privileged backgrounds have more access to civic engagement opportunities both within and outside of schools and as a result, are more likely to feel the benefits of such engagement. A lack of data means that we are not able to yet assess the impact this has on longer term outcomes and civic engagement.

Alongside family and the community, school provides an important site for civic socialisation, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including the opportunity to develop civic and political literacies, and practice civic-ness. Several studies identify teachers as key actors in developing children's civic behaviours. Nonetheless many studies identify missed opportunities to engage children in civic learning within these spaces.

Family and individual characteristics appear to impact civic socialisation, including development of political and civic literacies, as well as exposure to early opportunities of civic life. Whilst we can begin to predict this may affect children's civic socialisation and civic outcomes, the data is currently too sparse to draw more conclusive assessment within a UK context. Nonetheless, there do appear to be early gendered differences in civic engagement. The impact of experiential social action is considered to have a positive impact on longer term civic engagement.

The type of civic learning matters, especially in terms of children's developing competencies. The existing evidence base tells us that increased pro-active civic engagement at a young age leads to propensity to engage in pro-civic behaviours when older, for example social action, volunteering, charitable giving, philanthropy and democratic participation. The research also points to different approaches having greater impact at different stages. For example, storytelling, role-playing and practicing 'civic-ness' in everyday life (such as shared decision-making, critical questioning and thinking, sharing of resources, etc.) within the early and infant years help younger children develop vital political and civic literacies. Whereas experiential, participative, child-led, action-based learning, underpinned by critical thinking and discussions within middle childhood is shown to help children develop as social and political actors within a real-world context.

Challenges and Gaps in Research

This review raises some significant questions which should be explored further. Specifically, there needs to be greater understanding on what factors successfully support children's active civic

engagement and what barriers potentially prevent children engaging. Although some research is emerging, several studies point to a need to focus on quality of activities that children engage in and the discourses within which they are framed, more research in this area is required. Tailoring activities to children's emerging capabilities also appears to be important, developing civic and political literacies within safe environments where children can play with and test ideas, encouraged and supported by teachers facilitating these activities in open and inclusive ways. Further research into this is needed. International research points to the importance of experiential learning and active participation, these themes require further exploration within the UK context. There is also a significant gap in knowledge concerning programmes and initiatives which connect and cohere as children pass through infant and primary school into secondary education, alongside a lack of understanding about the impact of digital technologies on civic engagement.

Reviewing the evidence-based research also points to the importance of family and community groups in the civic socialisation of children, calling for a need for opening of civic spaces where children, and their families, can meaningfully engage as volunteers and donors. Furthermore, the context, culture, religiosity, family background, individual personality traits and media engagement all require greater interrogation in terms of how such factors shape children's civic socialisation. There is also an urgent need for understanding how children from diverse cultures and backgrounds and SEND children experience civic socialisation in the UK context and the role of educators in developing their civic-ness.

Underpinning this however and a key recommendation from this review is the need to challenge conventional wisdom which suggests adolescence is the phase in which people obtain civic, political and social orientations and competencies. There is little empirical ground for the sole focus on adolescence, and earlier phases of childhood have been consistently overlooked within civic socialisation literature. The good news is that this is a developing area, with several scholars now applying themselves to this work, nonetheless the field remains undeveloped and, where research does exist, it is largely US centric, thus requires greater focus from UK academics to understand how this key period of civic socialisation plays out in the UK context and thus should be a key research priority. Children's voices are significantly under-represented within the research, meaning little is known about their lived experiences, perceptions of and/or views as active, current citizens. This should also be addressed as a research and practice priority.

Finally, research should seek to explore the impacts of children's active civic engagement on their local and wider communities. Such studies may take into account the role of parents, families and communities themselves in facilitating such engagement.

Policy Recommendations

These suggested policy recommendations are made on the caveat that more research and understanding is required, and any further activity should be underpinned by robust evaluation frameworks:

- There is a need for increased recognition of the importance of civic socialisation, through the provision of citizenship education, within primary school years specifically at EYFS, KS1 and KS2. Programmes in EYFS and KS1 could focus on developing children's civic and political literacies, whilst developing and practicing their every-day civic-ness. Towards KS2 priority should be given to social action, action orientated type programmes which are underpinned by critical, reflective conversations and discussions. Programmes should take into consideration diversity, inclusion and supporting schools in disadvantaged areas, designed to reduce inequality rather than reproduce or exacerbate it.
- There are several civil society organisations and schools operating within this space already successfully delivering structured programmes of activities. Identification and collaboration with these organisations and schools to share learning and experience will likely benefit all.
- Schools are crucial in encouraging inclusive participation, and all primary schools should be encouraged to support civic socialisation of children and afford greater opportunities to children to develop their civic-ness. Many activities such as engagement in charitable giving, community participation, civic story-telling and development of civic literacies are already happening within schools, so instead of encouraging 'new' activity, supporting schools to maximise the value of existing activities, such as fundraising days, voluntary action or community participation, and formalised programmes to avoid 'missed opportunities' may prove fruitful. The research encourages teachers and other related stakeholders, such as fundraising charities, to move away from encouraging transactional engagement and neutral consensus attitudes even at an early age, and instead nurture children's voices within the debates and complexities of charity and giving. Furthermore, particular

attention should be paid to supporting the engagement of schools within disadvantaged areas to facilitate civic learning activities.

- Children should have an active role in shaping civic learning programmes, and programmes should be used as an opportunity to explore ideas and foster social and political discussion. Furthermore, children should be facilitated to lead in setting the agenda for activities through the provision of opportunities for children to take action in response to issues they feel passionate about. Online spaces offer a potentially interesting space for children's civic engagement, nonetheless, this requires further research and policy consideration.

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