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Published online: 26 Mar 2015.

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Co-designing a civics curriculum: young people, democratic deficit and political renewal in the EU

JUDITH BESSANT, RYS FARTHING and ROB WATTS

Contemporary discussion of the 'crisis in democracy' displays a tendency to see young people as the problem because they are 'apolitical', 'apathetic' and 'disengaged', or point to deficiencies in institutions deemed responsible for civic education. This discussion normally comes as a prelude to calls for more civics education. This article points to a renewal of politics at the hands of young people relying on new media, and draws on evidence like survey research, case studies and action research projects. This political renewal is occurring largely in response to the assumption of political elites that a 'politics-as-usual' will suffice to address the major political challenges of our time. Against the assumption that teachers, curriculum experts and policy-makers already know what kinds of knowledge and skills students need to *become* good citizens, we make a case for co-designing a contemporary citizenship curriculum with young people to be used for the professional development of policy-makers. We argue that such an intervention is likely to have a salutary educational effect on policy-makers, influence how they see young people's political engagement and how they set policy agendas. The article also canvasses the protocols such a project might observe.

Keywords: youth politics; new media; democratic curriculum; co-design

There is now general agreement that European democracies, like many democratic polities around the globe, are in trouble. While some commentators speak of a crisis of democracy (Graeber, 2013; Posner, 2010), others refer to a 'fear of politics' (Hay & Stoker, 2009) or a 'democracy deficit' (Schneider, 2013). This argument is supported by evidence of a decline in traditional forms of political engagement, party membership,

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falling voter turnout and declining electoral support for major parties. Concerns about the health of European democracy also increased, given the rise of xenophobic movements targeting immigrants and asylum seekers, and the share of the vote going to right-wing movements began to increase, with obvious effects for the complexion of European politics (Naval, Print, & Veldhuis, 2002, pp. 107–110).

One theme central to this pessimistic commentary is the claim that young people are disengaging politically. This is not a new anxiety nor is the conventional solution namely the need for more civics education.

As Keating et al. point out, the Council of Europe initiated projects addressing the need for education for democratic participation in the 1950s and 1960s (Keating, Ortloff, & Philippou, 2009, p. 146). The Council of Europe also ran conferences for practitioners and policy-makers and produced 'civics education' teaching materials (Council of Europe, Council for Cultural Co-operation, 1963). The latest surge of interest in young people's political engagement began in the 1990s when extensive public discussion and academic research turned to the 'youth-politics relationship' (Benedicto, 2012). In the 1990s, the Council of Europe began issuing policy statements encouraging more civics education (Council of Europe, 1998, 1999). By the mid-2000s, Osler and Starkey pointed out that across Europe there was:

> … a recognition that democracy is essentially fragile and that it depends on the active engagement of citizens, not just in voting, but in developing and participating in sustainable and cohesive communities. This, in turn, implies education for democratic citizenship. (Osler & Starkey, 2006, p. 433)

Concern about youth disengagement led to claims that young people were no longer skilled or motivated enough to become citizens or to engage in politics, or that key institutions like families, schools and community-based organisations were failing to cultivate basic civic dispositions and skills (Henn & Foard, 2014). The most recent concerns about political participation by young people were sparked by the Great Recession of 2007–8 and the subsequent imposition of 'austerity' measures on a number of states in the European Union (Furlong & Cartmel, 2012; Henn & Foard, 2014).

These concerns elicited calls for schools to 'do something' about this 'democracy deficit' (Norris, 2003). In its *European Union Youth Strategy, 2010–2018,* the EU went so far as to announce that political participation was one of its core concerns and announced its intention to support 'young people's participation in representative democracy and civil society at all levels and in society at large'. The last few years have seen considerable effort invested into detailing the elements of a new 'civics curriculum' (Kisby & Sloam, 2012; Tonge, Mycock, & Jeffery, 2012).

Yet, as Amna and Joakim argue, some curious anomalies characterise this research and commentary (Amna & Joakim, 2014). Firstly, while those involved in the discussion say they are interested in 'civic engagement', the differences between 'social', 'civic' and 'political' engagement are often either blurred or opaque. Other writers have noticed confusions

between or even conflation of 'civics education' and 'citizenship education' with 'democratic education' (Keating et al., 2009; Osler & Starkey, 2006). Secondly, some commentators have queried whether political scientists know much about what young people are doing, given that traditionally many political scientists have not been all that interested in people who do not vote, like those under 18 (Amna & Joakim, 2014). Thirdly, little attention has been given to the way this policy problem has been represented. Bacchi (2009) has insisted on the need to pay attention to how a policy problem is represented since this is crucial for determining the kinds of policy solutions which are adopted; no assumption can be made that empirical research simply reports on the 'reality' or significance of a problem (Bacchi, 2009). Finally, and most significantly, there is now a considerable body of research indicating that young people are not disengaging from politics but instead are redefining what politics is and how to engage in it in new ways (Bakardjieva, 2005, 2009, pp. 91–104; Bennett, 2008, pp. 1–2; Bessant, 2014b; Dahlgren, 2013; Farthing, 2010).

Given these issues, there is value in addressing the following questions that focus on the development of a curriculum designed to promote democracy. Is there good reason for accepting this evidence about political disengagement by young people? If not, and if there is a case for questioning this narrative of disengagement, how then should this influence our thinking about a curriculum promoting democratic engagement? How might such a democratic curriculum be developed and what might it prescribe?

In this article, we assume the value of democratic theory developed by the pragmatist tradition (See Dewey, 1927 and Unger, 1987, 1998, 2007: also Festenstein, 1997) and the more specific tradition of 'democratic education' associated e.g. with Dewey (1933), Giroux and McLaren (1986), Guttman (1999) and Pearl and Knight (2000). Central to this latter tradition is the way its exponents value the student experience and voice. We draw on this tradition to propose a new relationship between teachers and students as they co-design a curriculum that links the study of power, language, culture and history to critical pedagogy and political activity.

We begin with an overview of the literature on young people's political engagement. This provides a framework for thinking about a new curriculum project which we propose in this article. We then make a case for a co-designed curriculum project involving young people, older curriculum experts and policy-makers. Such an exercise, we argue, will enhance democratic practice within education settings, allowing students to learn to develop new knowledge and skills as they 'learn by doing' in ways which acknowledge their own capacity and political agency.

We have in mind a curriculum designed for policy-makers to help them better understand the politics of young people, to enable policy-makers to reflect on their views and polices and in so doing, improve policy-making practices. In the final section of the article, we ask what protocols might be helpful for describing the project we have in mind and for offering practical assistance for those interested in pursuing such a project. We argue that such a curriculum is required to help counter certain dominant assumptions informing policy-making and education

in particular; that young people are apolitical, apathetic and not at all interested in politics or civic engagement. This, we argue, is a false assumption. The co-design of civic curriculum for policy-makers will help inform those who make the policies about the kinds of new and old forms of politics young people are engaged in. We argue that young people are ideal partners in such a project because they have direct interest, insider's experiences and knowledge and skills that educators involved in civics curriculum design for students, and educators involved in the professional development got policy-makers do not. Working together with educators and policy-makers, the young people involved not only get opportunities to make a valuable contribution to policy, but also have the chance to communicate what it is they are doing politically, and in the process of designing the curriculum they learn about pedagogy, design and policy matters.

Political disengagement by young people? A reality check

There is a large and polarised research literature about young people's political engagement. This suggests there is value in reflecting on the ways young people's politics are currently understood.

On the one hand, as Benedicto points out, there are many political scientists offering an 'alarmist' account of disengagement among young people (2012, p. 719). Young people are disengaging from political life and civic participation (Henn, Weinstein, & Wring, 2002, pp. 167–192; Kimberlee, 2002; Print, Saha, & Edwards, 2004; Wattenberg, 2007). Recent *Eurobarometer* data (April 2013) indicates that of the survey respondents who became eligible to vote, over a quarter (27%) chose not to do so. With regard to European Union elections specifically, around one third said they were unlikely to vote. Among the reasons given for not voting, 54% said they were not interested in European politics and elections. In the UK, one survey of 18–25 year olds found a significant level of disengagement from conventional political activity. Those surveyed claimed that politics was largely irrelevant to their lives. A large majority (77%) did not admire any politicians, while 60% were 'not proud of the British political system'. Only one per cent were members of a political party. Other surveys repeatedly indicate that participation by young Europeans, especially in traditional or conventional political processes, is shrinking (Heeraman, 2012; Marsh, O'Toole, & Jones, 2007; Osler & Starkey, 2006). Not surprisingly, this research characterises young people as apolitical and apathetic, sometimes explained in terms of their alleged selfishness, narcissism or lack of basic political knowledge (Arvanitakis & Marren, 2009; Bell, Vromen, & Collin, 2008; Osler & Starkey, 2006). Others claim that young people are no longer motivated to become citizens or to engage in politics because key institutions like families, schools and community-based organisations are failing to cultivate civic dispositions and skills (Furlong & Cartmel, 2012).

Yet, there is an equally large literature telling a quite different story. This research represents young people as politically engaged and/or as

harbingers of new kinds of politics (Flanagan, Sherrod, & Torney-Purta, 2010). This body of work points to changed modes of political engagement by young people using on-line technologies. This approach emphasises the evolution of a digital community and new forms of active youth citizenship (Vesnic-Alujevic, 2012), driving a revival of a 'public sphere' and democracy (Bessant, 2014b).

Here, we see a binary in the research and public commentary about young people's political participation. Young people are either chastised as the apolitical heralds of a 'democratic deficit' or they are treated as the harbingers of sophisticated new forms of online politics. This binary representation is problematic. This suggests the need for systematic enquiry into what political activities young people are actually engaging in that may provide a good starting point for thinking about a democratic curriculum.

For authors like Manning (2009) and Farthing (2010), this binary representation fails to grasp the complexity of young people's actual engagement with contemporary politics. Others who agree argue that too many of these studies do not ask how young people understand the 'political' (Henn & Foard, 2014; McCaffrie & Marsh, 2013, p. 113). They refer to a failure on the part of political scientists to reflect on their assumptions about what defines 'the political', assumptions which are then relied on to characterise young people's political activity. If we do not understand how young people understand politics, it is difficult to demonstrate they are actually 'disengaged'. Farthing observes that the disengaged paradigm overlooks the heterogeneity of young people and how some young people engage quite actively in issues that concern them (2010). For Norris (2003) and Bang (2005, 2009), representing young people as disengaged from 'politics' ignores the prevailing practices and capacity that re/invent new forms of politics. McCaffrie and Marsh suggest that, 'a pervasive problem with the mainstream participation literature [is that] a restrictive conception of politics forces a restrictive understanding of participation' (2013, p. 116). Indeed, it may well be that the limited way in which young people are encouraged to think about politics and discount their own political activity suggests explanations for their apparent disinterest in conventional politics.

Designing a democratic curriculum?

There is a long tradition of thought and research claiming to show that if we want to revitalise and sustain democratic citizenship, increasing levels of civic knowledge and information is something best done by experts working in the educational system (Galston, 2007). This claim relies on the assumption that unless citizens possess a basic level of civic knowledge—especially about the relevant political institutions and processes—it is difficult for them to understand political events or to integrate new information into an existing framework. There is a substantial body of research which suggests that civic knowledge can help citizens understand their interest in political processes and how they can more effectively promote their interests (e.g. Zaller, 1992).

Research also suggests that the best way to advance civics knowledge and civic engagement is in school (Jung, Kim, & de Zúñiga, 2011; Schulz, Fraillon, & Ainley, 2013; Youniss, 2011). One study of 90,000 14-year-olds in 28 countries (Torney-Purta, 2002) found that school-based civic education can help create a classroom climate that encourages respectful discussions of civic and political issues in ways that fosters civic knowledge and engagement, and that an explicit focus on learning about voting and elections increases the likelihood that young people will participate in elections when they reach voting age.

Yet, as Amna and Joakim argue, it is difficult to demonstrate a distinct role for civic education in improving levels of civic or political engagement (Ekman & Amnå, 2012, pp. 283–300). A substantial body of countervailing research argues that schools do not play a significant a role in developing civic or political engagement (e.g. Boyd, Zaff, Phelps, Weiner, & Lerner, 2011; Haste, 2010; Manning & Edwards, 2013). Schools do not operate in a neutral way. What is more, the ways schools are organised tend to reproduce socioeconomic conditions, which shape political values and dispositions. However, given the space constraints of this article, we cannot engage that debate here. Instead, we make the case that a 'new' approach to curriculum design be adopted involving co-designing a democratic curriculum that can also be used for the professional development of policy-makers. This, we suggest, is an educative exercise for students, educators and policy-makers.

There are two elements involved in this proposal. One is to adopt the practice of curriculum co-design. The other is to ensure that the political components of this curriculum reflect new understandings of politics. Such an exercise in curriculum development can model new collaborative relationships between young people and educators and policy- makers. What is 'new' here is not just a case for involving children and young people in designing a civics curriculum, but the proposition that more effort be made to educate the policy-makers and political elites by drawing on the expertise of young people. We develop these propositions in two steps.

Democratic curriculum and the co-design principle

The idea that young people might work with teachers in co-designing a curriculum is not new or radical. Traditional service delivery in interventions like health, welfare or education has long seen the 'client', 'patient' or 'student' as passive recipients of the service. Then, in the 1980s and 1990s, a 'citizen-centered revolution' gave 'students' and 'patients' a role in service improvement by using client feedback like customer-satisfaction surveys (Lenihan & Briggs, 2011, p. 35). Co-design is the next stage in that development (Lenihan & Briggs, 2011). This citizen centred 'movement' showed how co-design has been used in government, community and health sectors to extend traditional consultation methods and increase programme reach and impact across a wide array of policy and programme areas. In co-design, those affected by the proposed design are

actively involved as partners in the design process (Lenihan & Briggs, 2011, p. 35). Co-design is intended to extend the role of the public or specific clients of a service and invite them to contribute to planning policy, programme or services. It is important that the relevance of this for children and young people be established.

There is now a significant body of theoretical and practice literature addressing the development of co-designing in health service policy and delivery in ways that include young people (Kennedy, 2010; Sustar, Bowen, Dearden, Fisher, & Wolstenholme, 2013; Truman & Raine, 2002). Co-design involving young people is also used by Research and Development companies that develop digital products and services. It has also featured in many studies of co-designing with children (Guha, Druin, Fails, Simms, & Farber, 2004; Katterfeld, Zeising, & Schellhowe, 2012). Educators have also expressed interest in co-design evident e.g. in the 1990s search for 'curriculum authenticity' and in the degree to which students, rather than teachers or curriculum designers, mapped their learning activities onto the external world (Heath & McLaughlin, 1994; Rudd, Colligan, & Naik, 2006). In the UK, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education ran workshops in 2011 to develop curriculum principles which included developing 'a new curriculum for difficult times' based in part on co-designing the curriculum.

However, the earliest most consistent and defensible use of co-design occurred after Dewey initiated the 'democratic education' project. While this tradition has strong roots in American pragmatism (Dewey, 1927; Unger, 2007), its uptake in Europe appears to have been slower. In 2008, the European Democratic Education Community ran its first conference in Leipzig, which has expanded its reach since then. Scholars like Biesta (2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2013) made a major contribution to exploring the forms a democratic education project might take. There is also now a growing body of important work by European scholars who have been re-examining the relationship between digital media, young people and civic engagement (e.g. Bakardjieva, 2005; Giroux, 2011; Livingstone, 2008; Livingstone, Lunt, & Miller, 2007; Ólafsson, Livingstone, & Haddon, 2013).

The democratic tradition sees democracy as goal and method of learning (Giroux, 1989; Guttman, 1999). Democratic schools involve students in the decision-making process that affects what and how they learn. According to Gould, democratic education is 'an education that democratizes learning itself' (Gould, 2003, p. 224). Its advocates position teachers as 'transformative intellectuals' who aim to create self-determination in a community of equals. This project is committed to developing critical citizenship via an ethical and political discourse that recasts the relationships between authority and teacher's work, and schooling and the social order (Giroux, 2011; Giroux & McLaren, 1986, p. 1). Equally, democratic education poses a challenge:

> Basing education upon personal experience may mean more multiplied and more intimate contacts between the mature and the immature than ever existed in the traditional school, and consequently more, rather than less,

guidance by others. The problem, then, is: how these contacts can be established without violating the principle of learning through personal experience. (Dewey, 1938, p. 21)

One part of the answer to this last question is that young people have their own understandings and approaches to politics.

A new politics

There is now a considerable body of research describing the ways some young people now operate with a different conception of politics. This research traces out the convergence of digital and networked communications afforded by the Internet and social media and new kinds of politics since the 1990s (Dahlgren, 2009; Kahne, Lee, & Feezell, 2012; Kligler-Vilenchik, 2013; Kliger-Vilenchik & Shresthova, 2012). Several features characterise this new politics.

Firstly, it is a politics that is highly interactive. The affordances of the global Internet mean that a variety of technical means now exist, enabling extended participation which ensures that extensive deliberation can now take place between people of any age (Castells, 2008; Marshall, 2011; Westling, 2007). As Bessant demonstrates, the attempt by the US Congress to outlaw free downloading of film and music failed to take account of the extensive Internet-based deliberation about the threat to freedom of speech this provoked (2014b). This means too that there is an interest in expanded forms of deliberation where participants value listening to each other and encourage new styles of mobilisation, political action and creativity based on values like equity, fairness, openness and a pluralism of views. These features were evident in the Occupy Wall St. movement and the development of 'Anonymous' as a global free speech and pro-democracy movement (Diesing, 2013).

Secondly, it is peer-based and not always preoccupied with traditional hierarchies or positional authority. The very anonymity of the Internet means that power disparities like asymmetries of power, resource, experience or social status tend to be mitigated (Castells, 2008; Lakitsch, 2013, pp. 9–11). While acknowledging that, however, we note that politics in youthful activist communities cannot be void of power asymmetries and can also produce highly gendered space (Kennelly, 2011, 2014, pp. 241–260).

'Anonymous' staged a number of major collective interventions in the history of the Internet targeting governments, corporations and high-profile individuals. They relied on the distinctive capacity for users of 4chan for their anonymity, a principle which proponents of 4chan defend on the grounds that it promotes increased rationality and freedom of expression. Unlike most web forums, 4chan does not require users to log in or register. Moreover, bulletin boards like 'b' has no rules about what can be posted other than requiring users to be compliant with local and/ or US law (Underwood, 2009). Anonymity is the dominant norm of this online site. Indeed, Rule Number 4 says 'The posting of personal information … is prohibited' (Zanoni, 2010).

Thirdly, there is no distinction drawn between forms of cultural creativity and expressivity and the political (Saklofske, 2011). Bessant discussed the interplay of cultural expression and the political signified by the 'Pussy Riot' project in Russia (2014b).

4chan was initially designed for conversation and image-sharing especially of Japanese Manga art. 4chan then became a major site of Internet-based conversations. While users across the site remain anonymous, conversations in the boards with a specific theme follow threads on-topic (Zanoni, 2010).

As Zuckerman, Roberts, McGrady, York, and Palfrey (2010) noted while Anonymous has become (in)famous for its use of denial of service raids, those raids were carried out in the name of free speech. Anonymous attacked the Westboro Baptist Church's Website called *Godhatesfags.com*, the Sarah Palin campaign website in 2008 and in December 2010 as part of a broader assault on Mastercard when it withdrew financial support for Wikileaks. Anonymous also played a key role in the Arab Spring when it established *Anonymous Iran*, a pro-democracy website after allegations of ballot fraud surfaced in Iran in 2009. Innovative research is now being undertaken to map this interplay of cultural expressivity and new politics (Kahne et al., 2012; Kahne, Middaugh, & Allen, 2014; Kligler-Vilenchik, 2013).

Finally, this research acknowledges that the new politics involves a critique of the 'politics as usual' model which promoted a political consensus around a core neo-liberal project to expand the free market and shrink the state. Some young people have rejected this consensus, having experienced decades of failed neo-liberal policies and conventional electoral politics across Europe. Ostensibly committed to enhancing the social participation of young people, the dominant neo-liberal 'active citizenship' policy frame installed in the 1980s has actually failed to ameliorate increasing levels of social disadvantage for young people (ILO, 2012; Ortiz & Cummins, 2012).

In the UK, Howker and Malik (2013) argue that many people born after 1979 have experienced mounting tertiary-fee debt, youth unemployment rates of 22% (in 2012) and the inability to access decent affordable housing, courtesy of neoliberal policies. 'The dream of a good life' has collapsed and increasing numbers of young people have become disappointed by and cynical about claims that more education is an 'investment in human capital' (Bessant & Watts, 2014, pp. 138–153). The Great Recession of 2008–9 exacerbated this collapse of hope as young people especially in the UK, Spain, Ireland, France, Italy and Greece have been the chief casualties of European 'austerity' measures (Bessant & Watts, 2014).

Our discussion suggests that many young people have established new approaches to using digital networks involving the re-imagining of politics and constituting new political imaginaries and new kinds of political action oriented to new norms of free non-hierarchical interaction (Bessant, 2014b). These features suggest the emergence of a new kind of non-hierarchical politics (Dahlgren, 2009).

Those setting the civics education and the policy agendas seem to have overlooked this renewal of politics sponsored by young people. It is a renewal that occurred in spite of, and perhaps even in reaction to, assumptions by political elites that a 'politics as usual' will suffice to address the major political and social challenges of our time.

This evidence challenges conventional approaches to 'civics education'. The conventional paradigm assumes that older people—as designers of curriculum—can best represent the politics of young people and deploy the knowledge and skills young people need to *become* 'citizens'. We make no such assumption. We assume that young people have been developing valuable new political knowledge and skills that ought to be incorporated into 'citizenship curriculum'. Given this, we make the case that young people as well as their elders could co-design a democratic curriculum that is open to new forms of political identities and practices.

What then might such a co-designed curriculum as part of a democratic education project look like?

One obvious difficulty we face in beginning to develop such a project is that we cannot be too prescriptive without involving young people. If we are prescriptive, we fall into the trap of countermanding the very idea we propose, that is, listening to what young people say from the start. For this reason, we limit ourselves to that task of identifying certain considerations that can inform a co-design democratic curriculum project of the kind described above.

Protocols: co-design and democratic education

The protocols outlined below rest on the idea that a co-designed democratic curriculum necessarily involves creating a 'community of inquiry' in which teachers, students *and* policy-makers work together and learn from each other in 'mutually beneficial partnership' (Radinsky, Bouillion, Lento, & Gomez, 2001). This requires a major rethinking of traditional roles and responsibilities, especially on the part of teachers and policy-makers who usually have little if any practical engagement with schools or universities, let alone with the teaching staff. It will also involve identifying opportunities for students to demonstrate their competence as political and creative agents, and to maintain a focus on the primacy of student experiences.

There is one further important desideratum. The development of a democratic curriculum of the kind we have in mind is not simply a response to 'the problem' represented as 'apolitical', 'unmotivated' and 'apathetic' young people. Rather, it highlights the normative value of democratic education and the value of co-designed curriculum. It values what young people can bring to the table in terms of relevant and innovative ideas and skills. A co-designed project of this kind also offers valuable educative opportunities for educators and policy-makers. Reflected in Habermas's (1996) account of deliberative democracy and by Pettit's (1997) account of the republican tradition, there is value in recognising the capacity of young people to participate in decision-making about

matters directly effecting them. The principle of co-design also has the benefit of enhancing student interest in the curriculum itself because it is designed by and with young people. It also works to *enhance* policy-makers' knowledge and insight into what is actually happening in the life worlds of young people in their communities.

Protocol one: recruiting participants

Co-designing curriculum requires participants with the required knowledge and skills relevant to the task at hand. This entails recruiting students, teachers and policy-makers who are sympathetic to the idea of a democratic project. While considering who may be suitable, it may be useful to keep in mind how this model of practice challenges traditional assumptions about (i) the unidirectional flow of ideas and skills that historically flow *from* the teacher *to* the student and (ii) the flow of ideas and decisions *from* governments *to* citizens.

For this reason, the involvement of participants with sympathy to the ideas set out above is important. In the initial stages of any such project, we would suggest the recruitment of participants who have a demonstrated capacity to recognise the valuable contributions students can make to curriculum design, especially when it comes to subjects about which they have considerable knowledge and in some domains privileged access.

It will also mean recruiting young people who are already engaged in the new forms of politics who have some of the new political skills and sensibilities as well as certain dispositions like the capacity to critique, an orientation towards optimism etc. (Wintersberger, Alanen, Olk, & Qvortup, 2007, p. 3). The selection or recruitment of young people can rely on processes of self-selection within the school or university. We anticipate there will not be a shortage of volunteers, given the degree to which so many young people are now engaging in new forms of politics typically not recognised as such by their elders (primarily because they tend to rely on fairly narrow accounts of what constitutes politics).

There is also the issue of 'job descriptions'. This may be appropriate for educators to help ensure they are clear about the requirements for the job and have dispositions that are aligned with the general ethos of such a project.

Finally, given the skewed account that many policy-makers and politicians seem to have of young people's politics, there is a case to be made that such a curriculum project has social value if policy-makers are also actively involved in the co-design process. In the same way, most professionals are required to undertake professional development; so, too many policy-makers and politicians are involved in such a process. Thus, curriculum co-designed with young people may be used for the professional development of policy-makers, to inform those practitioners about how the 'recipients' of their policies experience them, how young people see prevailing political arrangements, their conceptions of politics and the political activities they engage in. This can enhance the prospect of better policy because it will be informed by an understanding of young people's own experiences.

Protocol two: identifying and overcoming obstacles

One feature of the prevailing educational practices that may make our proposal for co-designed curriculum seem radical to some, is that curriculum has long and primarily been done by adult experts. In most countries, curriculum is devised by state-run education agencies typically constrained by complex administrative and accountability requirements. In such settings, students typically play a minimal or negligible 'consultative' role (Lange, 2008). Any move to co-design a civics curriculum, like to move to co-design in general, faces a number of social and institutional barriers. Identification of these and other obstacles is critical if strategies are to be developed to overcome them.

A project such as this calls for a rethinking of 'child-centred social investment strategy' that underpin much educational policy across Europe (Lister, 2003, p. 427), and argues instead for education as a democratic strategy. It is about recognising education as a fundamental social good, rather than an investment in future human capital. These are significant challenges to the dominant practice of educators, policy-makers and students and need to be discussed with participants before the project gets underway.

The prevailing asymmetry of power relations that characterise most contemporary educational settings is one in which students are subordinated to teachers and other curriculum experts, an arrangement that is an obstacle to genuine co-design projects. While this connects to earlier protocols about clarity of purpose, we reiterate the importance of subverting the ways power is generally exercised so that reciprocal interactive flows of knowledge between all participations are facilitated as opposed to the more traditional one-way and downward flow from educator to student. This requires attention to practical resource issues to ensure students are enabled and supported to participate in curriculum development on relatively equal footings, as well as preliminary staff development for educators and policy-makers to ensure they are 'on board'.

Protocol three: the practice of enquiry and deliberation

Central to any democratic curriculum, and especially a co-design project, is the task of ensuring that all participants engage in a deliberative process of enquiry about what they value and why a democratic curriculum project is valuable. Amongst other things, this is critical for gaining clarity purpose (which we identify in protocol four).

Central to this is the question: how we understand and work towards achieving a good life and a good society. This involves an enquiry into human goods. Identifying these goods is critical if the project is to be oriented towards promoting good life, a life in which we can thrive or be as good as we can at what it is we value. These go beyond instrumental goods (like qualifications, efficiency, vocational skills or income levels) which are not ends in themselves, but a means to an end, a way of achieving something else. For two classic discussions of this non-utilitarian approach to the human goods see Finnis (1980) and Nussbaum (2013).

A second core aspect of this enquiry will involve an enquiry into the nature of good practice understood as professional practices as well as civic life. Flyvbjerg's (2001) account of 'good practice' for e.g. provides a point of departure for an enquiry into the nature of good practice, the obstacles to it and more generally what is required if it is to be pursued. The protocols derived from Flyvbjerg's (2001) account of 'good practice' are designed to ensure clarity about the values, interests and power relations among participants in a common deliberative and co-design process.

The revival of the republican tradition by Pettit (1998) provides another helpful point of departure for thinking about ideas like social justice and the nature of the good society. (Pettit argues that liberty is a condition enjoyed by a person or group to the extent that no other person or group has the capacity to interfere in their affairs on an arbitrary basis (Pettit, 1999, p. 165).

The republican framework makes the pursuit of the common good a key theme, emphasising the need to articulate explicit commitments to 'civic virtues' defined according to what promotes the public good in its various forms. With this in mind, we also suggest that challenges to the republication tradition in relation to democracy offered by writers like Benhabib (1992) and Mouffe (2005) are also worth taking on board especially in a time when difference and plurality of legitimate forms of life are central to democratic education projects.

This has clear implications for a curriculum co-design model devoted to enquiry.

Protocol four: clarity about the purpose

We need clarity about why we value a milieu of democratic culture in the school or university that models and helps educate students, educators and policy-makers about democratic practices beyond the institutional gates. What social goods does it encourage? Promoting this protocol requires that we recognise the legitimacy of the student, their voice, ideas, thoughts and opinions. This ensures their agency is recognised and what they offer is valued. This protocol recognises the rights of children and young people as set out in the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (art 14 and 12) to exercise freedom of thought and 'the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them' and that these views need to be 'given due weight in accordance with the age maturity of the child'.

It is a protocol that also helps ensure there are opportunities in place for students and staff to learn how to make good judgement and to build and affirm student's identity as active citizens.

Protocol five: obligations

As educators, what do we owe students? Part of our obligation is to help ensure students are able to choose what it is they value and to develop their capacities. In turn, what are the obligations of policy-makers to other

participants, and what are the obligations of students to their teachers, to each other and to policy-makers?

One obligation on the part of educators is to recognise a student's moral and political competence as a political agent framed by a republican concern with their liberty (Pettit, 2012). In the context of this discussion, this entails seeing students as active learners and also as teachers in the sense that they are teaching their teachers and policy-makers about politics (Giroux, 2011, p. 11). Recognising this helps make it clear why having an effective voice over the content of the curriculum matters.

It is an approach that may involve some participants having to face well-engrained ideas about young people and their capacities. Good judgement on the part of the educator is critical here because care needs to be taken to not fall back on naturalised paternalistic assumptions about young people as unable to make choices because they are deemed to be not ethically or cognitively competent. As writers like Taylor (2005) note, we need to acknowledge that students (under 18) have a moral status derived from the fact that they are people with an *entitlement to exercise freedom to make choices about matters like the content of their education.*

In this way, exercising good judgement on the part of teachers and policy-makers requires reflexivity because acknowledging the various capacities students have or do not have can entail relinquishing certain power (Bessant, 2014a, pp. 138–153; Sharpe & Schwartz, 2009). Indeed, if it is the case that a student cannot do X on their own, that obligates older people (teachers) to assist them in making good choices and having experiences that develop their capacities, but to do so in ways that are mindful of their own agendas and the politics or interests embedded in how they go about 'helping'. In short, it is action that entails acknowledging that the 'information' or explanation provided to students is not neutral. For this reason reflexivity and care is required in how the issues and information is framed as it is used to support a student exercise freedom (Bessant, 2014a, pp. 138–153).

All this points to the ethical, legal and bureaucratic 'challenges' involved in such a project. While we do not have the space in this article to detail each of these, we point to some that require consideration: namely the age of consent, duty of care, legal culpability (related to disclosures or involvement of any illegal or other 'risky' activities like 'hacking', denial of service activities). In addition, there are a number of possible obstructions related to important cultural, professional and bureaucratic obstacles that come in the form of policies and processes to say nothing of the near ubiquitous ageism directed towards the young (Bruehl-Young, 2012).

Conclusion

In this article, we made a case for engaging in a democratic curriculum model based on the principle of co-design. It is a valuable project because it harvests and builds on knowledge and skills in ways that affirm the status of young people as moral and political agents. It offers educators

opportunities to learn about the political life worlds of their students and to work collaboratively with them in ways that are oriented towards the development of more democratic institutions and practices.

It can also produce a curriculum that will better inform those who develop policy about the actual political profile and activities of young people in ways that counter inaccurate and damaging stereotypes of youth as apolitical, narcissistic and disinterested in civic activities. It will draw on the experiences, knowledge and skills of young people to inform the development of curriculum for the professional development of policy-makers about the question of youth politics. Given that we could not prescribe such a project in this short article, we offered a number of protocols that can guide such a practice.

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