

IDS Working Paper 158

Learning citizenship

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Summary

Renewed interest in promoting citizenship has drawn attention to the need for approaches to learning citizenship that can be tested and evaluated in practice. Adult education for citizenship, which has a long and diverse history, has not been emphasised much in current thinking on citizenship and rights. Likewise, research advances in understanding how people learn have not been linked with the citizenship education discussions. This paper integrates three, often disparate, threads of research and practice: on citizenship itself, and what active citizenship entails and requires; on adult education for citizenship; and on learning. Within the first theme, citizenship is defined as more than a set of legal rights, but as an active practice requiring both citizen initiative and state responsibilities to facilitate citizen action. What is needed in order to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and how can the necessary attributes of citizens be developed?

The paper then reviews some of the ways in which citizen attributes are learned and developed: through socialisation into political cultures, indirect learning through participation in community groups and social movements, and education for democracy including both popular adult education and civic education by the state and formal institutions. The final strand of research considered is on how people learn. In the last 20 years in particular there have been significant advances in understanding how the brain works, and the dynamics of “socially situated” learning. We have a much better understanding (from psychology, anthropology, cognitive science, neuroscience) of the importance of the social context for learning, the role of experience and action, and how the brain manages knowledge. Whilst this research has not directly addressed citizenship learning, it could contribute efforts to promote active citizenship. In a final section the paper poses questions and challenges for education efforts to promote active citizenship.

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1 Introduction

This project began in informal discussions at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) among a small group of adult educators from India, the UK and southern Africa about the need for new thinking in education for citizenship. We were aware of the long history of adult education for citizenship and felt it was often sidelined in the new focus on citizenship and human rights. We were also aware that there have been considerable research advances in understanding how people learn, and that these have not yet been systematically linked with the citizenship education discussions. We planned this discussion paper as a means of generating discussion about possible new approaches to learning citizenship that can be tested and evaluated in practice. We wanted to bring together three main threads of research and practice that are generally pursued separately: on citizenship and what active citizenship entails and requires; on citizen education; and on learning.

The starting point for our discussion was the renewed interest in promoting citizenship in many parts of the world. In the North there are concerns about social exclusion and the reputed decline in civic participation. Anxiety about citizenship tends to come in waves, prompted by social transformations like increased immigration (like in the United States where “Americanisation” education for immigrants has a long history), social upheavals like war and its aftermath, and increasing inequalities between rich and poor. Recent political changes including loss of traditional allegiances to political parties and increased political volatility lie behind the new concerns about citizenship in the North.

In the South there are key concerns about citizen participation, especially in contexts of recent democratisation and decentralised governance, and in rights-based approaches to development. There is a growing sense that poverty, marginalisation and discrimination can only be overcome through active citizenship and responsive governance. A report on *Citizens and Governance* by the Commonwealth Foundation in 1999 gathered data in 47 countries on how citizens view the good society and the respective roles of citizens and government. The report makes a strong case for direct, practical and meaningful participation of all citizens in governing the affairs of society.

The second element in our discussion is the long and diverse history of education for citizenship, not widely known outside of education circles. In the current focus on participation and rights there has been a “loss of memory” about earlier citizenship efforts. Yet there is a rich body of practice and some theory that spans back over a century or more and most of the world. In particular the history of adult education for democracy and of popular education (often accompanying social movements and change efforts) are fruitful as a starting point for new initiatives.

The final strand of research dealt with here is on how people learn. In the last 20 years in particular there have been significant advances in understanding how the brain works, and the dynamics of “socially situated” learning. We have a much better understanding of the importance of the social context for learning, the role of experience and action, and how the brain manages knowledge. These all have implications for how people learn to be active citizens, and for education efforts to promote citizen engagement.

This working paper takes a broad look at all three strands, and identifies some lessons and challenges for citizenship education efforts. It starts with reviewing what is meant by citizenship, and what citizens do. What is needed in order to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship? How are the necessary attributes of citizens developed? The paper then reviews several of the ways in which citizen attributes are learned and developed: through socialisation into political cultures, indirect learning through participation in community groups and social movements, and education for democracy including both popular adult education and civic education by the state and formal institutions. Finally, the paper reviews the substantial new work on learning coming from other fields (psychology, anthropology, cognitive science, neuroscience). Although these have not directly addressed citizenship learning, we need to incorporate this new understanding of how people learn in our efforts to promote active citizenship. In a final section the paper poses questions and challenges for future work.

2 Citizenship

There is no single agreed definition of what a citizen is, or what a good citizen does. It is perhaps one of those inherently “messy” concepts that defies neat definition or categorisation (learning is another). There are two main conceptions of citizenship. One focuses on legal *status* (born to or acquired) with an accompanying bundle of various rights and responsibilities.¹ The other focuses on citizenship as a *practice*, as active participation in affairs of the state for the good of the wider community. In turn, the active participation interpretation of citizenship might confine participation to the political sphere, or include also participation in the “civil society” – that is the realm of voluntary associations and informal networks in which people engage for personal and social as well as political ends.

Because this discussion paper focuses on learning, it takes citizenship to be not simply a legal status, a passive bundle of rights and responsibilities, but also an active practice. Citizenship as practice assumes the existence of legal rights and responsibilities. It forces us to look not just at citizen action but also at the responsibility of the state to facilitate citizen action. Ruth Lister suggests the need for a synthesis of the two strands of thought about citizenship: “to be” a citizen and “to act as” a citizen:

Citizenship as participation can be seen as representing an expression of human agency in the political arena, broadly defined; citizenship as rights enables people to act as agents . . . I want, however, to draw a distinction between two formulations – to be a citizen and to act as a citizen. To be a citizen means to enjoy the rights necessary for agency and social and political participation. To act as a citizen involves fulfilling the full potential of the status. Those who do not fulfil that potential do not cease to be citizens.

(Lister 1998: 228–29)

¹ T.H. Marshall first characterised these rights as in three areas: legal, political and social (*Citizenship and Social Class* 1950). Sociologist Bryan S. Turner expands these rights to include global rights, in particular environmental, cultural and aboriginal (Turner 2000: 1).

This Working Paper focuses mainly on citizen action (active participation in democratic processes) and assumes the necessary accompaniment of legal, political, social and other rights in order to participate.

Democracy is another contested concept – all democracies are flawed in some respect, and should be viewed as dynamic entities in a constant state of flux and development, not necessarily on any one linear path, but including some form of popular control of the policies of the state.

Representative democracy is characterised by election of policy-makers, while direct democracy is finding new expression in some participation and participatory governance work. The actions of citizens in a democracy are not confined to voting (at local, state or national levels), or communication with law-makers. Citizenship should be viewed as taking part in decisions that affect people's lives. These range from the most immediate and local level (street, neighbourhood and village) to the global. As de Tocqueville asserted, democracy is not a matter for individuals acting alone, but for collective engagement:

Among the laws that rule human societies there is one which seems to be more precise and clear than all the others. If men are to remain civilised or to become so, the art of associating together must grow and improve in the same ratio to which the equality of conditions is increased.

(Democracy in America, quoted by Reilly 1995: 8)

The *Citizens and Governance* research by the Commonwealth Foundation found association and participation to be key needs expressed by citizens once basic survival needs have been met. 'Citizens say that the spirit of a good society is embodied in caring and sharing' (Commonwealth Foundation 1999: 33). But beyond helping one another, people want to see a society in which they can participate, first in terms of equal rights and justice, and second in responsive and inclusive governance.

Citizens believe that a good society is one in which they can participate in public spheres to make their own contribution toward the public good . . . They want to be heard and consulted on a regular and continuing basis, not merely at the time of an election. They want more than a vote. They are asking for participation and inclusion in the decisions taken and policies made by public agencies and officials.

(ibid: 38)

If citizenship in democratic society requires active participation, then we must answer the question of what citizens must know and be able to do in order to participate fully, to "act as" citizens. The term "attributes" is used here instead of the more usual term "competence". Supposed lack of competence has often been used to limit or exclude some people from democracy. Women, the illiterate, those without property have all been excluded from voting, justified on the basis of their supposed incompetence to act appropriately as citizens. Proponents of democracy have usually been reluctant to talk about competence, leaving it to opponents of democracy (Smiley 1999: 372). The term attributes is intended to be descriptive rather than prescriptive, to imply that many kinds of abilities contribute to the whole.

2.1 Citizen attributes

Clearly, one's definition of citizenship shapes how one thinks of citizen attributes. If citizenship is primarily a legal status, then citizen attributes would most likely be knowledge of one's rights and perhaps the attitude to take those rights seriously. If citizenship is participation in a community then attributes might include those required for association, communication and collaboration. Citizenship as political engagement would focus more on knowledge of the political structure and deliberative skills. A review of literature suggests we need to look at three broad areas of citizen attributes: knowledge, abilities and dispositions.

2.1.1 Knowledge

Knowledge is at the forefront of most definitions of citizenship. We need to ask both *what* knowledge is essential, and *whose* knowledge is deemed important. Political science would define "what" knowledge is important for citizens as political structures, parties, names of office holders etc. In most countries, citizens know less than political scientists would like. Surveys from Zambia, for example, suggest about half those surveyed could name their local councillor, MP or the Vice-President – and these were quite high knowledge levels compared with some other countries (Bratton and Alderfer 1999: 812).

There is, however, another school of thought about what knowledge is needed by effective citizens in order to exercise their roles effectively:

We believe that voters are far more competent than an assessment of their factual knowledge would suggest. Voters do not need all the information about their government that theorists and reformers wish them to have, because they learn to use "information shortcuts", easily obtained and used forms of information that serve as "second-best" substitutes for harder to obtain kinds of data. These shortcuts incorporate learning from past experiences, daily life, the media, and political campaigns.

(Popkin and Dimock 1999: 117)

Rather than count how many people can name which political office-holder, Popkin and Dimock pay attention to the underlying framework of knowledge and understanding of how government works. This, they say, shapes how new knowledge is absorbed and how citizens make inferences and form judgements. So the knowledge required of citizens is not simply information – a collection of political facts. It is rather knowledge in the sense of understanding and awareness. Active citizens need to have a broad framework of understanding that enable them to make judgements in the political sphere. In order to exercise their rights they must know them. In order to participate and have their voice heard, citizens need to understand power and how to have an impact. Because citizens act together, they need to know and understand something of the conditions of other citizens, to support collective action. In the context of global society more than ever people need to sift, decode and interrogate the increasing amount of information that reaches us.

As well as examining what knowledge is needed, we need to look at *whose* knowledge is deemed of importance. Often the expert view is regarded as the most important, because it is based on research and a supposedly objective standpoint. But participation requires that the knowledge of those who are experiencing the problem be regarded as important, valid and valuable in reaching the decisions that affect them. In the Commonwealth Foundation study citizens said they want information to be shared, and decision-making to be transparent so that the contributions of different experiences and knowledge are clear.

2.1.2 Abilities

Abilities describe what one is able to do. The term is preferred to the more common “skills” because it focuses more broadly on what one is able to do, and implies that a range of different abilities can all contribute. The abilities of active citizens centre especially on the arts of engagement with others. They may include negotiation and compromise, influencing others and exercising leadership, communicating and collaborating with others. “Deliberation” is one of the core characteristics of a parliamentary democracy, and involves the testing of arguments for and against a course of action – something, as Soltan says, ‘to prevent us from doing stupid things’ (1999: 6). In a participatory democracy the ability to deliberate should be widely shared, not restricted to political office holders. Deliberation requires both voice and listening, both negotiation and compromise along with influencing others.

When people picture the “good citizen” they often think of helping others in the most small and everyday tasks – taking food to someone who is ill, helping a blind person cross a busy road, taking care of the elderly. The ability to perform these neighbourly acts is widely shared: citizenship is not an exclusive or elite realm of action but a very practical one.

Some analysts argue that citizenship is not just about talk but about action for the common good (Boyte 1999).

Voting, protesting, and complaining are not sufficient; neither are deliberating, being responsible, caring, or volunteering. Only through public work together will we be able to create a new democracy that regenerates the sense that “we the people” are authors of our common fate.

(Boyte 1999: 277)

Citizens in particular roles may need particular sets of skills and knowledge – local elected officials, for example, will need more specialised leadership skills than their electorate. But all citizens, in order to participate fully and exercise their rights and responsibilities, need to be able to communicate and negotiate with other citizens. They must be able to form opinions and express them, revise opinions on the basis of new information, and work together with likeminded others to have an effect on decisions that affect their lives.

2.1.3 Dispositions

Dispositions are habits of mind, reflecting deeply-held values and attitudes that underpin effective citizenship. Knowledge and skills alone can be anti-democratic without espousal of “democratic values”. The underlying dispositions of democratic citizens are seen by some as a sense of justice and fairness, and care for others. Rosenblum, for example, argues for two main requirements of democracy in everyday life: treating others identically and speaking out against ordinary injustices (1999: 68). She argues that ‘the disposition to behave democratically in mundane affairs is as important as political competence for maintaining the social climate in which democratic institutions can flourish’ (ibid).

In the Commonwealth Foundation study, citizens place values at the core of the good society, ‘Communitarian and associative values and norms based on tradition and cultural heritage are important features of a good society’ (Commonwealth Foundation 1999: 32). Liberal conceptions of citizenship also have a central place for what de Tocqueville called *mores* and more recently Bellah called ‘habits of the heart’ (Bellah *et al.* 1985). These argue that good citizens are not just active ones. They have dispositions like a sense of connectedness to others, an awareness of common interests and a willingness to live with or resolve differences without recourse to violence.

Gaventa (1999) argues that development of critical consciousness is also essential for full citizenship. An underlying critical or questioning stance, an attitude of inquiry, a scepticism toward authority, can be seen as an underlying disposition that is essential to democratic participation and protection of freedoms. Allied with this is sense of efficacy – a sense that one can have an impact, and the self confidence to attempt it. Gramsci suggested that ‘it is necessary to direct one’s attention violently towards the present as it is, if one wishes to transform it. Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will’ (Gramsci 1971: 6). These dispositions underpin the particular actions citizens may pursue, or knowledge and skills they attain, and make them all possible.

How are active citizens developed? What is the process through which individuals learn the knowledge, abilities and dispositions needed to practice citizenship? Learning takes place at many levels, only some of which are conscious and deliberate. At one end of the scale is civic education in formal educational institutions like schools – planned, conscious and deliberate. At the other end of the scale is tacit or unrecognised learning through socialisation. The next three sections will review three points along the scale, starting with socialisation into political cultures, then indirect learning through participation in community and other groups, and finally citizenship education through popular and state education.

3 Developing citizenship through socialisation

Socialisation into political culture results in broad societal characteristics and attitudes. Classic political science research (e.g. Almond and Verba (1963) and Pye and Verba (1965)) often regards the most important element in the creation of political cultures to be the attitudes of elites, assuming that these lead and shape the attitudes of the masses. More inclusively, Taylor, in considering political culture and democratisation in El Salvador, describes political culture as:

The specifically unwritten norms of conduct both of and between the various political actors operating in society, together with the concomitant expectations and understandings of the rights and responsibilities of citizens, representatives, public servants and so on.

(Taylor 1999: 64)

Political culture shapes what people expect of their political system, what they see as possibilities for their own action, and what rights and responsibilities the various actors are perceived to have. It is not static: Taylor argues that political culture is ‘developed through experience and practice and is constantly changing’. It may itself be a site of political struggle. At the same time that it shapes political discourse and the sense of what is possible, it is in a constant state of tension as it is pulled from the bottom and from the top.

Yet because it is embedded, political culture is usually not visible or questioned. Its significance, and the importance of social and political factors in shaping it, is most clear in situations where democracy is new and striving to overcome years of totalitarian or authoritarian regimes. In El Salvador, for example, Taylor writes of the history of rule by the dominant coffee growing class who controlled the land and production, and later the financial and industrial sectors. They ruled through the politics of patronage and violence, and through manipulation of representative institutions. However, this dominant political culture is not the only one in El Salvador:

It would be a mistake, though, to portray El Salvador’s citizens as being wholly swayed by a political culture steeped in exclusion, coercion and corruption; the history of struggle has created its own set of heroes, stories, ideals and modes of behaviour which combine to create an alternative politics and an alternative political culture.

(Taylor 1999: 67)

Alternative political cultures exist in tension with each other. In any society they may be based in class, gender, ethnic or religious identities, creating parallel sets of expectations and values about appropriate political conduct. In Australia, for example, there has been growing awareness of the alternative identity of aboriginal peoples, and debate about the role of education in enhancing or destroying it. An independent college, Tauondi (meaning “breakthrough”) was established in South Australia in the early 1970s for adult education of aboriginal people (Holt *et al.* 1997). Started with the aim of addressing the concerns of their

clients — racism, economic disadvantage, health and education — Tauondi has raised deeper issues about education for what, by whom and for whom?

Aboriginal people are beginning to highlight the deficits of education whereby identity loss has come at the cost of accreditation. The white education pie is not necessarily wholesome. Aboriginal people are questioning more and more aspects of success which conspire against their identity. Having been adulterated and assimilated, more and more are returning to their roots and rejecting the outside labels — both negative and positive.

(ibid: 192)

Broad cross-cultural comparisons are likely to miss finely nuanced political cultures. But if political culture is, as Taylor asserts, a site of political struggle then we have to understand all the possible variants and their potential impact on citizenship. In a recent thesis, Blackburn examines the relationship between political culture, power and participation in a town in Bolivia (Blackburn 2000). His research recognises that active participation requires both structural changes in the patterns of power and also attitudinal changes in the beliefs and expectations of citizens — in short the political culture. Culture is the bridge that links power and participation. When political cultures are closed, mistrustful and pre-democratic, Blackburn argues, increasing participation and the flow of information at the grassroots tends to add power to the already powerful rather than empowering citizens. When political cultures are more open, transparent and democratic, increasing participation can create more empowered citizens and more accountable government (ibid: 220).

The tension between alternative political cultures and the slow process of their change is evident in the history of political participation by women. In a case study from Bangladesh, Rahman Khan (1998) argues that the mainstream of political life and culture in Bangladesh is not conducive to women's participation. Indeed, the author establishes how limited is formal engagement in the political system by women, and how little that has changed over the years. Women have lagged behind men in most development areas, including literacy, nutrition, employment, wage rates, inheritance. 'The structures in the economic, social, political and cultural arenas of the public world operate in the ideological context of patriarchy' (ibid: 178). New forms of oppression and violence against women have been brought in by expansion of fundamentalism and the growth of fatwas by mullahs against women in rural areas. When women attempt to enter into the public, economic and political arenas, there are many examples of how their lives are adversely affected.

Increasing dowry demands, violence, exploitation in employment places, differential wage rates, the whole range of severe impediments women face in seeking/competing for public office, are examples of the strong presence of patriarchal ideals and attitudes of a male dominated social order.

(ibid: 169)

Yet at the same time, on the informal level, there has been a long process of women creating political space for themselves. Bengali women participated actively in the independence and libertarian movements in 1947 and 1971. In more recent years there has been a growing lobby of women's organisations working hard to create awareness on women's issues. NGO participation, conscientisation efforts and credit programmes are all enhancing women's abilities to play a stronger role in the public sphere. The political culture that excludes women's participation exists alongside a more hidden history of participation by women in political action, and a movement that challenges exclusion.

The process through which both mainstream and hidden political cultures are passed on from generation to generation is known as socialisation. 'Every new generation must be won over to democracy' (Oscarsson 1995: 201). In primary socialisation children are brought into alignment with cultures and processes of the adult world. Any subsequent induction of adults is called secondary socialisation. Based on our socialisation we make what Jarvis (1987) calls "presumptions" – assumptions that the world operates in a particular way.

Much socialisation takes place within the family and community (including religious institutions). The "hidden curriculum" of schools also is aimed at "reproducing" the social order. It persuades us that it is right that power should be exercised in certain ways and not others, that some people should make decisions and not others, that some things are possible and not others (see Illich 1971 and Macedo 1994).

Socialisation creates deep-rooted assumptions that are hard to change, even in a revolutionary situation. For example, the literacy crusade in Nicaragua was conducted in a moment of profound social and political change, which shaped both its expectations and possibilities. But that also meant that it was created amid creative conflict between old and new, between a vision of the future and the need for practical means to realise it. Both campaign staff and volunteers (*brigadistas*, who were sent into the countryside to teach literacy) were confronted with their personal histories – as mostly middle-class, educated urban people for whom rural areas and people were largely unknown. Despite their conscious desire to overcome paternalism, it was difficult for such people to see rural people as intelligent, skilled and creative. 'Although the new, specially selected staff members were profoundly committed to the revolutionary goals, they found that personal and political transformation was not just a matter of desire or will' (Miller 1985: 206). These tensions found full expression in the problems of designing pedagogy. The old ways had to be unlearned and new ways created. The key factor was not so much staff's political commitment or educational skills but 'their definition of self and . . . their personal view toward other people' (ibid: 208).

While socialisation is an unconscious process of learning, it is not thoughtless. As Jarvis suggests,

Individuals do not merely receive these impressions from culture and have them imprinted; rather there is a process of thought and then, also, one of externalisation. Hence individuals actually modify what is received and it is the changed version that is subsequently transmitted to other people in the social interaction.

(Jarvis 1987: 14)

Except in times of serious challenge to our belief systems (as in rapid social change), political socialisation operates below the level of conscious awareness. Other forms of citizenship learning can be more readily recognised and may even be planned and intentional. The next section of this discussion paper addresses one of the most important arenas of citizenship learning: indirect learning through participation in political life, social movements and community organisations. Although this kind of informal learning can be recognised, it is not necessarily planned by oneself or others, and so is distinguished from education for democracy which is discussed in the following section.

4 Learning through participation

Learning through doing seems to be a key route to active citizenship, although there is little hard evidence. Mansbridge (1999) traces the origins of the idea that participation makes better citizens back to Aristotle, although the main impetus for the idea came from de Tocqueville's observation of small scale direct democracy in New England town meetings. But the empirical proof of the assertion is difficult, perhaps impossible to find. Studies consistently show that people who participate in democratic politics have other admirable qualities, but there are no "before and after" studies to show the effect of participation (as opposed to the selective participation of those who have such qualities). Studies do show how unequal political participation is (for example, Verba, Scholzman and Brady 1995). Mansbridge argues that unequal participation matters because:

Less participant citizens have a reduced capacity to develop their faculties through joining with others in deliberating on and forging a common good, a process that can clarify their conceptions of their interests, enlarge those conceptions by encouraging them to make the good of others and the whole their own, generate greater feelings of political efficacy, and ultimately benefit the larger society by anchoring it in a citizenry clearer about its interests and responsive to the claims of justice and the common weal.

(Mansbridge 1997: 423)

In other words, if everyone participates in political life they learn better participation, and everyone benefits.

Popular social movements by definition call into question old habits and beliefs, and raise new options for participation and action. They should be prime sites for critical learning or "conscientisation" in Freirean terms and provide many experiences for learning citizenship. Marshall (1993) describes the village meetings, established by FRELIMO (Front for Liberation of Mozambique) in liberated areas during the Mozambique liberation effort, as both a learning process and an experience of direct democracy. They provided 'a new forum for adults to be together and to think collectively about the transforming of their circumstances and themselves' (Marshall 1993: 111). The village meetings took the form of questioning, relating and sharing experiences and listening to each other, in sharp contrast to

either colonial or traditional approaches to decision-making, confronting issues of gender, race and ethnic inequalities.

Learning through social and political campaigns can be in much smaller scale efforts. Foley describes the learning of a group of Australian residents through a local environmental campaign (Foley 1999). The Terania Creek residents challenged the governmental Forestry Commission over its plans to log old growth rainforest. In interviews looking back on the campaign, Foley identified two main kinds of learning. First, the activists acquired new skills and knowledge.

They developed considerable expertise in rainforest ecology, expertise that they continued to use subsequently. They developed understanding of the State and its agents (public servants, politicians, judges), and skills in working with and acting on it. They acquired analogous understanding and skills in relation to the mass media. They also developed skills in, and an understanding of the complexities of, building democratic forms of organisation and taking direct action.

(ibid: 39)

Beyond skills and knowledge, this kind of participation resulted in what radical adult educators Freire called “conscientisation” and Mezirow called “perspective transformation” (see below for more discussion of these ideas). ‘The experience of the campaign challenged and significantly altered the campaigners’ understanding of the world’ (Foley *ibid*). Their initial faith in government and experts was tempered by their discovery of the social interests and power relations that infuse them. They changed their ideas of themselves and what they could do to change things. Foley calls this kind of learning ‘informal learning in social action’ since it was incidental, unplanned and unarticulated.

Citizen learning does not only happen through social movements and campaigns. It also seems that participation in the organisations of the civil society can provide experiences from which citizenship knowledge, abilities and dispositions are learned. There are studies that show the connection between participation in the civil society and political spheres – that those who are more active in civil society are also more active politically. McDonough *et al.* compare Spain, Brazil and Korea – three democracies that represent post-authoritarian settlements – to try to explain the puzzle of low political participation in Spain (1998: 919).

Using an index of political participation derived from surveys in the three countries, 27 per cent of Spanish respondents report high political participation compared with 49 per cent in Brazil and 58 per cent in Korea. None of the conventional demographic variables of political participation (education and class) explain this difference. The exception is women’s participation in the labour force (the higher the level of women’s labour force engagement the higher the levels of political participation). Instead, the authors argue that the differences in political participation are linked to differences in engagement in the civil society. Only about a third of the Spanish public belongs to any voluntary association, compared with two-thirds in Brazil and nearly 90 per cent in Korea. Civil society engagement is also associated with women’s labour force participation.

As we move from the “private” to the “public”, gender and employment status exert an increasingly powerful impact. Women tend to be only somewhat more neighbourly than men. But when it comes to voluntary association membership, and especially political participation, not only do inter-country gaps widen, evidence of the galvanizing effects of gender and employment also emerges.

(ibid: 929)

In these countries at least there seems to be a connection between membership in the civil society and political participation, mediated by gender and employment.

In the UK, research reveals both the extent and importance of local voluntary organisations (LVOs) in people’s lives, and the significance of the social and political learning that happens incidentally within them. Surveys by Elsdon (1995 and 1998) show that about 80 per cent of LVOs in the UK are personal interest-based – like pigeon fancying, gardening, singing, amateur theatre. Some 30–40 per cent relate to sport and physical exercise (Elsdon 1998: 144). Elsdon estimates that more than half the population are members of LVOs (30m out of a population of 58m), with about eight million of these being “activists” who carry out responsibilities for running the organisation.

What is the connection between this rich “civil society” and citizenship? Elsdon reports that “social learning” was the key area of learning reported by almost all the LVO members interviewed. 92 per cent spoke of the experience of membership as broadening their range of social contact and 40 per cent (many unemployed men and young mothers) said that it actually created the opportunity of social contact for them (1995: 54). The great majority also spoke of increased confidence and ease at speaking out within the group. This kind of learning suggests an important role for LVOs in supporting both the abilities and underlying dispositions of citizenship.

Elsdon also found “political learning” to be important: 76 per cent said they had become more aware of public policy issues, 59 per cent more aware of broader social issues and 49 per cent more aware politically as a result of their LVO involvement (1995: 70). A quarter said they had taken overt political action as a result of LVO membership, including speaking, writing and advocating. None of this was necessarily planned.

Respondents commonly told us that when they originally joined their LVO they simply wanted to get on with learning or doing whatever it was about. Any interest or understanding they developed beyond this had developed later from the experience of membership. Thus a Rotarian had joined for the sake of the social life; it was the subsequent experience of being involved with others in service activities which had first made him aware of social needs and social problems, and stimulated his political interests.

(Elsdon 1995: 71)

Learning through participation in community involves knowledge, abilities and dispositions. Indeed, values and the sense of self are perhaps most important. Foley describes the learning that emerged from involvement in neighbourhood centres (“houses”) in Australia (Foley 1999). These were established in the

1970s and 1980s for a variety of reasons – women’s desire to come together to end suburban isolation, establish playgroups for children, education for women, and to furnish productive outlets for women’s skills. Typically the original reason for participation led to other activities (ibid: 51). Women got involved in a playgroup for their children then many began to ask for something for themselves. That something may be adult education classes, paid or voluntary work in a house or elsewhere, or participation in the management of the house.

The whole experience of participating in a house is an important learning process for women. Much of this learning is informal and incidental, it is embedded in other activities, and it is often not articulated as learning by neighbourhood house members.

(ibid: 54)

In participating in the management of the neighbourhood houses women acquired many specific skills – how to read and keep accounts, how to make collective decisions and how to plan and budget. But underlying these skills are values and world views: ‘Most importantly, perhaps, participation in the committees gave women experience of the complexities of trying to run an organisation in democratic, “women-centred” ways’ (ibid: 58). Conflict and struggle are central to this informal learning – like the struggle over whether it was legitimate to ask for childcare while women were engaged in activities “for themselves”.

In retrospect the women could identify the political skills, knowledge and values they acquired in this struggle. As a result of their participation ‘the women become clearer about their own values and they recognise that, because people have different interests and values, conflict among them is inevitable, and that the conflict can be constructive or destructive’ (ibid: 63). Their learning is critical learning in that they stand back and re-examine their experience using concepts like power and values.

Changes in participation in one sphere may have impacts on another. In India, an evaluation of a Grassroots Management Training (GMT) project in three states revealed that training in micro-enterprise business skills had impacts on women’s involvement in community (Creevey and Edgerton 1997). The evaluation found that the women who had undergone the GMT training were more likely to take an active role in community decisions. ‘The GMT women both above and below the poverty line were significantly more likely to take part in community decision making than were their match peers’ (ibid: 670). The particular aspects of GMT that resulted in this impact are unknown. Possibly they include an increase in confidence, the experience of working in a group with other women, and the social networking provided by the training.

Radical adult educators have been working for just this kind of transformation as part of their work for social change. The next section will look at this kind of citizenship learning, in which planned and deliberate learning often accompanies social action.

5 Popular adult education

Adult education has a long history as an agent for social change in society. The roots of this approach to adult education go back through the twentieth and into the nineteenth century. They include Bishop Grundtvig and the Scandinavian folk high school movement, the Settlements, Workers' Educational Association and miners' libraries in the UK, Settlement Houses and the Highlander Folk School in the US. Most of these combined explicit political values and education with work on economic and social conditions. The Antigonish movement in Canada in the 1920s and 1930s, for example, was a programme of adult education, self help and cooperative development. Father Moses Coady, the leader of the movement, 'condemned the excesses of capitalism and placed his faith in the common people and the need to release their energies so that they could take over their own affairs' (Lovett 1980: 157). Learning and action on community development went hand in hand: Lovett quotes Coady as saying that 'common people – in fact all people – must parallel their learning with action. The action can best be found in the social and particularly in the economic field' (ibid).

The methods of the Antigonish movement have characterised many other adult education for democracy efforts since: mass meetings, study clubs, radio listening groups, short courses, kitchen meetings, conferences, leadership schools and training courses. In the study clubs or discussion groups everyday problems were discussed, ideas shared and solutions put forward. The prime focus was economic development and particularly cooperative development. 'Antigonish believed that radical change would come about through education, public participation and the establishment of alternative institutions, that is co-ops and credit unions, not explicit political action' (ibid: 160).

However intentioned, adult education on its own does not necessarily or quickly bring about social change. The long gestation period is evident in the work of an adult education centre established within the City Colleges of Chicago in the early 1970s 'to support and encourage the social change and self-help efforts of black and other poor communities and groups' (Heaney and Horton 1990: 77). The centre's first project was Peer Group education among residents of "housing projects" (government-owned housing). The idea was to organise small groups of women who, with a peer group leader, would decide on an agenda of problems and begin to act together to deal with them. The project was greeted with suspicion by women in the projects, but over several years the project spread to five public housing developments. Individual members learned and developed, but:

The program that fostered a degree of critical reflection among increasing groups of women failed nonetheless to significantly alter the conditions of their day-to-day lives. They never attempted to challenge that arbitrary and dehumanizing control that CHA [Chicago Housing Authority] exercised over their lives and their living conditions nor even to demand that their grievances be heard.

(ibid: 80)

Real change did not begin to happen until there was political change at the top, with the first black mayor of Chicago, a reform candidate. Several former Peer Group members were inspired by the idea of resident

management, which gradually began to develop with assistance by the adult education centre. Heaney and Horton highlight the problems with conscientisation and emancipatory education when there are no viable political options for change. They argue that transformative education does not *create* struggles but *accompanies* them.

Although the methods, approaches and content of popular or transformative adult education have been very diverse, four main strands characterise it:

- Talk – providing a forum within which people can share ideas, discuss alternatives and reach decisions.
- Cultural expression – using especially local cultural forms to give voice, pass on history and engender solidarity.
- Knowledge – creating and accessing knowledge from which people are excluded, whether it is knowledge of the state, of specific issues or synthesising “popular knowledge” (indigenous knowledge that has not been written down).
- Action – making a link between debate, knowledge and acting on decisions that affect people’s lives.

Talk is central to popular education and can take many forms. In Northern Nigeria, an emancipatory learning project in the context of a political party, Northern Progressive Union (NEPU), aimed to inform people, motivate them to act, and build “an enlightened citizenry” (Umar 1993: 29). From 1950 to 1966 the project used methods like discussion groups and mass meetings (along with poetry and songs). The discussion groups were only open to NEPU’s members, but appear to have been successful in ‘building group solidarity, internal cohesion and the movement’s capacity for collective decision-making and action’ (ibid). These were the places where local decisions were taken about what was to be protested against and in what form.

In Northern Ireland, Tom Lovett founded the Ulster People’s College (UPC) in 1982,

To bring the fragments of social and community action together, i.e. community groups, trade unions, women’s groups, etc., to work towards a vision of a new society based on the radical analysis of existing structure, and lessons and aspirations of the men and women attempting to create new structures at the local level.’

(Lovett 1993: 37)

Among the activities of the UPC were short courses (up to 10 weeks) that ‘seek to explore the causes of sectarianism and not simply the feelings evoked. By looking at the causes we are more in a position to discuss the lines of action along which these causes can be removed’ (ibid: 40).

In the educational philosophy of Myles Horton, founder of the Highlander Center in the USA, peer learning through discussion is central. He argued that poor and working people are the experts on their own experiences and problems, and the best teachers of each other:

I think of an educational workshop as a circle of learners . . . The job of the staff members is to create a relaxed atmosphere in which the participants feel free to share their experiences. Then they are encouraged to analyse, learn from and build on these experiences. Like other participants in the workshops, staff members are expected to share experiences that relate to the discussions, and sources of information and alternative suggestions.

(Horton 1990: 150)

Cultural expression often distinguishes popular education from more formal adult education. Songs, poetry and theatre have all characterised popular education efforts. In the Northern Nigerian mass meetings described by Umar, poetry and songs were used alongside the discussion. These cultural expressions had a long history in the region dating back at least to the struggles of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The songs ridiculed the establishment, recognised “those who have wronged us”, and emphasised the need to persist in the struggle against oppression (Umar 1993: 25). Similarly in the Zimbabwe liberation war, the *pungwe* village meetings included songs. Foley quotes a Catholic priest’s description:

They teach their catechism by rote and song. Freedom songs make the rounds at beer drinks in the evenings when the mood is festive, this creating a feeling of freedom. Essentially, they state that they will reclaim the land of their forefathers, led – as they claim to be – by their ancestral spirits. The movement is thus given a distinctly religious line that leads right back to the first Shona rebellion. The riches of the land, mines and plantations belong to all and not merely to a few whites.

(Foley 1993: 14)

Cultural expression was always an important part of the work of the Highlander Center in Tennessee, USA, and it extended beyond music, poetry and drama to food. Horton said that:

Song, music and food are integral parts of education at Highlander. Music is one way for people to express their traditions, longings and determination . . . The food has to be as carefully thought out a part of the workshop as the music and the dance and the informal times when people can walk and talk and get to know each other better.

(Horton 1990: 158–59)

Knowledge addressed in popular adult education is tailored to the particular social issues and problems being experienced by participants. It may include political institutions, history (and collective memory) and popular knowledge of social, environmental and economic conditions. It may focus on knowledge from within (systematising the knowledge the group or community has gained through its experience) or from without (accessing “expert” knowledge that affect people’s lives). In Highlander workshops, for example, the starting point is participants’ own knowledge about their experiences, problems and concerns. New

knowledge is brought in as staff feel it is appropriate and practical – the emphasis being on knowledge that can be used to work on problems.

Participatory action research (PAR) has developed as part of popular education, providing tools for people to access knowledge that has been withheld from them, and to create new knowledge through their own research. PAR activities have included health surveys of workers or community residents where there are concerns about exposure to toxic substances (see for example Merrifield 1993), studies of absentee ownership of land (see Gaventa and Horton 1981), agricultural practices and housing conditions. What sets PAR apart from its academic counterparts is its link with citizen action and its involvement of non-researchers at all stages from initiation to design to conduct and analysis of the research.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA/PLA) offers an array of tools to assist participatory knowledge creation, including ways to gather, systematise and analyse the knowledge of a community in order to contribute to policy and practical development (Chambers and Blackburn 1996). ‘PRA can be described as a family of approaches, methods and behaviours that enable people to express and analyse the realities of their lives and conditions, to plan themselves what action to take, and to monitor and evaluate the results’ (ibid: 1). Many of the PRA methods employ visual devices that enable people to create and map their knowledge, and to analyse and prioritise needs.

Literacy is itself a particular form of knowledge, and it allows access to other sources of knowledge so has been particularly important in popular education. In an overview of popular education literacy work in Latin America, Campos Carr suggests the process is designed to move people from “common knowledge” to “critical knowledge”, but that the process is neither quick nor easy. Drawing on the work of Paolo Freire in Brazil, these literacy efforts use “generative words” that teach both literacy and political ideas, like in this Colombian literacy primer:

The manual shows the word *educación* as the first word to be learned. The word teaches the five vowels and has the following sentences: ‘The education in Colombia.’ ‘Education is the right of the people.’ Other words like housing, health, employment/underemployment and phrases like working class and its struggles, the situation of the peasants (*campesinado*) and its struggles, are topics.

(Campos Carr 1990: 64)

Earlier, during the US civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, the Highlander Center had developed literacy education linked to explicit political action. The Citizenship Schools were first established in the Sea Islands of Georgia with the aim of teaching black people to read and write in order to pass the voter registration tests that then excluded many from the right to vote (see Tjerandsen 1980). Using everyday literacy texts like mail order catalogues and the bible, and with teachers drawn from the local community rather than professionals, the Citizenship Schools were not only innovative in terms of literacy methods but also became of wider significance to the movement. The model for the schools was taken up by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and spread across the Southern states.

A more recent application of Freire's ideas in literacy education is REFLECT, a project developed by ActionAid, which tries to combine Freirean approaches with the visualisations developed in PRA. Rather than using literacy primers, REFLECT literacy circles develop their own visual learning materials (maps, calendars, diagrams and matrices). The method 'aims to promote active dialogue . . . and empowerment. As participants construct their own materials they take ownership of the issues that come up and are more likely to be moved to take local action, change their behaviour or their attitudes' (Archer and Cottingham 1996: i). Evaluation of the initial pilot projects suggested that participants had increased their participation in community organisations (61 per cent of learners in El Salvador reported that they had assumed formal positions of responsibility in community groups). The discussions in the literacy classes often led to community level actions to improve local conditions. Control groups of people in conventional literacy classes showed few signs of life changes, suggesting that literacy per se does not change lives.

Similarly, Marshall (1993) argues that literacy undertaken as a totalising project for social control does not contribute greatly to democracy. She argues that voice is central to participatory democracy, so literacy campaigns in which people develop and use their voice can have democratic outcomes.

Action is the aim of popular education generally, although not necessarily achieved within it. The action component is perhaps most easily seen in the context of popular education associated with social movements. The American civil rights movement, for example, not only had the indirect learning that one would associate with any mass movement, but also had planned and deliberate education components. The Highlander Folk School (later known as Highlander Research and Education Centre) was often a resource to the movement, in which leaders could retreat to reflect and plan strategy. Heaney and Horton (1990) recount a 1960 workshop involving 75 black and some white students from the forefront of early student demonstrations across the southern US. In fact for the previous six years students from the same colleges had been coming to Highlander for weekend workshops, but had not been involved in action. The difference with the 1960 workshop is that the student sit-ins had started. At the opening session, Myles Horton, Highlander's educational director, said:

As far as I know this is the first time since this protest started that a group of people from various places has gotten together. Something may come of it that would help further the things you believe in. And I just want to emphasize that we are here to help you do what you decide to do.

(Heaney and Horton 1990: 74)

The workshop not only brought together people who had been working separately, but it challenged them to begin thinking as a movement. 'They were asked questions about their basic philosophy, about the method of nonviolence, about the dilemma of law and morality and their presumed right to defy an "unjust law" as well as about their future plans and relationship to the larger community' (ibid: 75). Note the difference between being asked questions and being given information. Students broke into working groups on philosophy, methods, community relations and communications. Their report and

recommendations on direct action methods to achieve change became the foundation of a new organisation, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) which played an important role in the civil rights movement.

A more recent call for educators to take the role of helping social movements pose problems, rather than solve them, is from Luc Dekeyser:

The task of the professional advisor is clearly shifting from contents and theme to the agogic-methodical level.² The professional approach in old social movements and in present-day action groups was always modeled on expertise regarding content and involvement. Agogic action as learning to select has no need for expertise re. contents and theme, but for agogic skills which are related to advising self-learning and self-governing groups.

(2000: 16)

Popular education is characterised by its position outside the formal structures of power – schools, colleges, political parties and government. Its natural orientation is change not the status quo, challenge not acceptance, action not passivity. It can be conceptually distinguished from civic education as the arm of the state or powerful institutions. In practice, however, there is more of a gradation, especially when formal civic education is carried out as part of democratisation efforts. In the next section we review the range of activities in civic education.

6 Civic education

By this is meant the explicit attempt by institutions (of the state or private sector) to teach the knowledge, abilities and dispositions of citizenship either to children or adults. These may be most focused in post-revolutionary or post-authoritarian situations, when the state is trying to create new citizens for a new democracy. But civic education also characterises some “mature democracies” that face concerns about declining political participation and inclusion. Often the focus of the state via its education system is on young people in school since democracy has to be renewed in each generation.

Civic education in the context of political movements is carried out in a period of profound social and political transformation, and is aimed at facilitating democratic participation. In Zimbabwe, mass political education by ZANLA (Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army) fighters during the liberation war was conducted mainly through the “*pungwe*” or local political gathering. Students who joined the guerrillas were seen as intermediaries who could absorb ideological principles and transmit them to the peasantry ‘who were believed to be unable to absorb socialist ideas without such help’ (Foley 1993: 10). The *pungwe* meetings involved political lectures by the cadres and a large measure of participation through the means of *chimwenga* songs and slogans. The messages reiterated over and over were the importance of unity and self-reliance among the people. Foley says the education ‘enabled people to reject colonialism

² ‘from identifying to helping with selection’.

and it prepared them to vote for a particular party in the independence election. But it did not give the peasantry attitudes and skills that would enable them to become a force for the transformation of production relations' (ibid: 15).

In post-revolutionary El Salvador there has been a concerted attempt at education for democracy. Participation in political parties is at an all-time low and the Salvadoran citizenry has no faith at all in its political leaders. Civic education is being conducted by the Ministry of Education (through a citizenship curriculum for schools and a youth competition), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and human rights social movements. Between them Taylor says these efforts have four desired outcomes:

- Empowerment or awakening – for people to become ‘subjects of their own development’.
- Knowledge and critical capacities as ‘a counterweight to the government within civil society’.
- Active participation – ‘those who know human rights know more clearly how to act in society’.
- A culture of democracy – ‘we inculcate the values, trying to get people to appropriate the values for themselves, so that then they practice them and so we generate a new type of culture’ (Taylor 1999: 69–70).

At the same time, there are technical problems in the way of registering to vote or voting, and no sense that elections have made a difference in people’s lives. Educational programmes alone seem unlikely to make much difference unless the structures themselves become more responsive.

A similar concerted civic education effort was conducted in Estonia during the 1990s. Estonia is a small nation on the Baltic Sea that became forcibly merged into the USSR following the Second World War. Part of the population was forced to leave, part was physically destroyed and part was “treated” ideologically with threats and pressure (Marja 1993: 59). In 1988, in the wake of “*glasnost*” in the USSR, the “singing revolution” happened when thousands of Estonians gathered at the Song Festival Grounds to sing their national songs together (not allowed for many years) and to recall their past. Many groups and “movements” sprang up over the next years, and many of them turned to adult education as a means to ‘achieve the proficiency and conscious activity of the whole population in order to ensure their competent participation in all spheres as well as continual self-improvement’ (ibid: 61). While the focus of the civic education was on nationalism and independence, the main avenues were voluntary association and popular movements (more than 30 at the time the article was written in 1993) – these became a “school of democracy”.

In the context of “mature” democracies, civic education has less impetus. The UK, for example, has a long history of discussion about the importance of citizenship education for young people in schools, but until now little actual practice. Under new proposals from the Department for Education and Skills, English schools have recently added teaching citizenship to the rest of the national curriculum. The current concern about citizenship education in the UK is only the latest since the widened franchise prompted anxiety about the capacity of uneducated or poorly educated people to vote responsibly. ‘The anxiety tends to come in waves – prompted by constitutional changes such as the extension of suffrage;

by the threat of totalitarianism in the 1930s; and by the social changes conditioned by the end of war' (Frazer 2000: 92).

Frazer reviews the widespread scepticism that greeted these proposals. There is little dissent from the notion that young people should be educated about political institutions, laws and history. But the teaching of values is more suspect – especially 'when it is legislated for by a government with unprecedented levels of centralized control over curriculum, teaching methods, assessment, and the governance of schools' (Frazer 2000: 88). She suggests the most important reason why there is no established tradition of education for citizenship is the 'lack of any wide assent to, consensus on, or even well articulated dominant account of the nature of politics, civic life, or the constitution . . . the weakness of the discourse or ideal of citizenship in UK political culture and institutions' (ibid: 89).

In most countries education per se has a powerful effect on a range of political outcomes including attitudes (e.g. longer years of schooling are generally associated with more "liberal" rather than "authoritarian" attitudes) and participation. But there is no clear indication that explicit political education has an impact on either political attitudes or participation. However, research has tended to focus primarily on recall of specific knowledge (e.g. names of politicians) rather than deeper political understanding, and on voting rather than broader political engagement. What should perhaps be central in citizenship education, as Frazer suggests, is preparing young people 'for coping with conflictual relationships and facing difficult choices in complex societies and politics' (ibid: 100). This kind of citizenship education is much harder than traditional "civics" and effective large-scale models have not yet emerged.

The fragility of impact of civic education is documented in Zambia. A follow-up survey of participants in various civic education efforts suggested that these had some impact on knowledge and values but little on behaviour (Bratton and Alderfer 1999). Researchers wanted to see if civic education helps create a political culture of democracy. They defined democracy in terms of voting, political knowledge as name recognition of various political office-holders and political culture as the civic values of political tolerance, interpersonal trust and trust in government. They found that most of the recipients of civic education efforts by NGOs were more educated people, and that while civic education had some discernible effect on political knowledge it had a lesser impact on values, or even a negative effect. Civic education recipients were more likely to express tolerance for diverse opinions, but were less likely to trust others and less likely to trust government. They were also more likely to register to vote and to vote, but when education levels and differential media exposure were taken into account these behavioural differences disappeared. Among those who lacked both education and media access, civic education had absolutely no effect. Among the educated and media exposed, civic education had some benefits.

It appears that civic education framed in terms of knowledge and perhaps values but without an experiential component has little impact on behaviour. However, there is a branch of civic education that is deliberately experiential: "service learning" (an American term) involves students (usually university level) in voluntary work in communities as part of their learning. It is based on the premise that 'Students best learn to do by doing . . . One learns about democracy, and for democracy, by practising it' (Reeher

and Cammarano 1997: 3). There has been only limited research on impacts of service learning, which have not generally substantiated significant behavioural impacts, but practitioners advocate strongly for its merits.

Battistoni, for example, argues that there are four benefits of a service learning approach to citizenship education. Students learn more about the community in which their institution resides. They learn that being a good citizen relates to both individual behaviour and relationships with others. They are forced to confront questions regarding their place in an increasingly multi-cultural society. And finally he argues that service learning must include classroom meetings in which the environment is democratic, egalitarian, and participatory, so that students can practice democracy in an area of their own community life (Battistoni 1997: 43). The latter is perhaps the most contested area of service learning, for there are teachers who do not agree that the classroom itself must be democratised in order for students to learn democratic ways. However, there is research suggesting that students in democratic schools are more highly motivated to participate in school activities, and even suggestions that they may continue to participate in the larger political process later in life (Freie 1997: 154).

These issues in civic education raise deeper questions about how people learn. What are the purposes for which people learn, how do they acquire and manage knowledge, what is role of experience in learning and the influence of the social context for learning? In the next section these questions will be explored through a review of some of the research on learning from several disciplines.

7 How people learn

Three broad areas of research on learning have relevance for thinking about learning citizenship. These three broad areas derive from somewhat different research traditions, although there is interaction and crossover between them:

- Situated learning – understanding the social context within which learning is shaped (related to research from cognitive and social psychology, anthropology and other social sciences);
- The role of experience and action in learning (which draws on all of the above plus adult education theory).
- Acquiring and organising knowledge (related primarily to research on the brain from both neuroscience and cognitive psychology).

7.1 Situated Learning

Learning is purposeful – people learn in order to accomplish purposes that are important to them. Scribner’s research on the “mind in action” shows that ‘we undertake cognitive tasks not merely as ends in themselves but as means for achieving larger objectives and goals’ (Scribner 1988: 1). Because we are social, these purposes are socially defined. In their everyday lives ‘people strive to satisfy purposes that

have meaning within their community, and in their activities they use tools, symbols, and modes of action that are culturally developed and transmitted' (ibid).

Learning is social even though it occurs within an individual. It takes place in specific social contexts that shape what is learned, by whom and in what ways. Since learning is always "situated" within specific social contexts, transferring learning to other social contexts is not simple.

Lave and Wenger consider learning not just as socially influenced but as emerging from engagement in "communities of practice".

I propose to consider learning not as a process of socially shared cognition that results in the end in the internalization of knowledge by individuals, but as a process of becoming a member of a sustained community of practice. Developing an identity as a member of a community and becoming knowledgeably skilful are part of the same process, with the former motivating, shaping and giving meaning to the latter.

(Lave 1991: 65)

In these communities of practice (which may include work groups, voluntary organisations, family groupings and informal networks and groups), individuals engage in common pursuits, create what is meaningful for them and gain their identity. Wenger describes identity as 'a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities' (Wenger 1998: 5).

Adult educator Mezirow argues that learning processes are profoundly influenced by our "habits of expectations" – that is a set of assumptions that constitute a frame of reference, which are socially as well as individually constructed (Mezirow 1990: 1). New experiences are assimilated and transformed by these assumptions, which are derived from our past experiences and from our social and cultural contexts.

These meanings are constantly reinvented and open to change – we are in active interaction with our environment, both shaping and being shaped by it. Cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner highlights the significance of the social context in learning and development when he contrasts the "world" of the child for French developmental psychologist Jean Piaget and for Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky:

The world is a quiet place for Piaget's growing child. He is virtually alone in it, a world of objects that he must array in space, time and causal relationships. He begins his journey egocentrically and must impose properties on the world that will eventually be shared with others. But others give him little help.

Vygotsky's world was an utterly different place, almost the world of a great Russian novel or play – Tolstoyan or Chekovian. Growing up in it is full of achieving consciousness and voluntary control, of learning to speak and then finding out what it means, of clumsily taking over the forms and tools of the culture and then learning how to use them appropriately.

(Bruner 1983: 139)

Central to the process of development (and therefore learning) for Vygotsky was the issue of consciousness. He argues that as with learning to speak (and then finding out its meaning), consciousness comes late in development of a function, only when it has been used and practised unconsciously (*Thought and Language* 1961 translation, quoted by Bruner, *ibid*). We do things through copying, trial and error, and only later come into intellectual control of it. The process Vygotsky outlined for gaining consciousness is the “zone of proximal development”.

Bruner describes this as consisting in ‘the child’s capacity to use hints, to take advantage of others’ helping him organise his thought processes until he can do so on his own. By using the help of others he gains consciousness and perspective under his own control, reaches “higher ground” ’ (*ibid*: 140). In this process called “scaffolding”, someone more skilled completes the elements of a task that are beyond the other’s current skill levels, leaving other, easier task elements to be completed by the apprentice or learner. Bruner describes one such example, book reading by a mother and child:

What a strikingly stable routine it was. Each step of the way, the mother incorporated whatever competencies the child had already developed – to be clued by pointing, to appreciate that sounds “stood for” things and events, etc. The mother remained the constant throughout. Thereby she was his scaffold – calling his attention, making a query, providing an answering label if he lacked one, and confirming his offer of one, whatever it might be. As he gained competence, she would raise her criterion. Almost any vocalisation the child might offer at the start would be accepted. But each time the child came closer to the standard form, she would hold out for it.

(Bruner 1983: 171)

Scaffolding is an important part of apprenticeship into any social community. Lave and Wenger describe apprenticeship as a process of slowly developing participation – ‘learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and . . . the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community’ (Lave and Wenger 1991: 29). In the apprenticeship process, people slowly acquire skills and knowledge within their own “zone of proximal development” – or what a Tennessee community organisation calls “the next do-able step” in their member’s development. The research on socially situated learning suggests we must view learning as a developmental process, a process not just of proficiency at a skill but of engagement in a community. Popular educators would say we have to look at people with two eyes – one for where they are now, and one for what they might become (Horton 1990: 131).

7.2 The role of experience and action in learning

Well before the recent research on social dimensions of learning, John Dewey, a pioneer in experiential education, believed that all human experience is social.

Experience does not go on simply inside a person. It does go on there, for it influences the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose. But this is not the whole of the story. Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had.’

(Dewey 1938: 39)

Dewey said that learning comes about through undergoing and interpreting experience. But all experiences are not equal in terms of learning:

The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative. Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience.

(Dewey 1938: 25)

Dewey believed that the experiences of the traditional classroom were mainly mis-educative, and he was an influential and passionate advocate for more democratic education. ‘Democratic social arrangements promote a better quality of human experience, one which is more widely accessible and enjoyed, than do non-democratic and anti-democratic forms of social life’ (ibid: 34). He suggested that the process of learning from experience is a spiral, starting with the conditions of the current experience, moving into a quest for new ideas and information, which in turn become the ground for further experience in which new problems arise. We must teach democracy through providing democratic experiences.

Adult educators have become so accustomed to the idea of learning from experience that we often take it as unquestioning and unproblematic. Experience leads to learning. We have forgotten what Dewey argued about mis-educative experience. And we often reify experience itself — that it exists out there as a real object. It is worth examining concepts of experience more closely.

There is a sense in which experiences do shape the brain itself. Animals raised in complex environments have greater blood supply to the nerve cells of the brain than those raised in cages, and the increased blood supply increases the overall quality of functioning of the brain. Similarly, learning has a physical effect on the brain, increasing the number of synapses (or neural pathways). In the early phases of childhood development, the brain overproduces synapses and then “prunes” them, which allows the brain to incorporate information from experience. This is most apparent in language development, for example infants can distinguish many more phonemes than adults – the Japanese capacity to distinguish the “r” sound from the “l” sound is lost during childhood because the language provides no experience to reinforce it.

In later adult life new synapses continue to be formed, driven by experience. For example, in the brains of all deaf people, some areas that would normally process auditory information become organised to process visual information, and there are demonstrable differences among the brains of deaf people who use sign language and those who do not, because they have had different language experience. So the

brain is shaped by experience but it also shapes how and what we perceive in our environment – how we experience it.

Since we are social beings, experience itself is socially constructed. As Johnston and Usher point out in reflecting on their own work,

It has become obvious that we have constructed different ways of understanding, theorising and representing our experience at different times, for different audiences and according to our changing implication within different contexts, narratives and discourses.

(Johnston and Usher 1997: 141)

Experience always has a quality of incoherence, and we select out from it what seems relevant, given our current levels of understanding and purposes. ‘The key question therefore is not – how is experience present? – but how is experience re-presented?’ (ibid). There is a dynamic and interactive relationship between experience and learning. Prior experience shapes how we perceive our environment and therefore new experiences. Each new experience shapes how we will experience in the future.

Most adult educators would go beyond simply experience as learning itself to claim an important role for reflection on experience. Kolb proposed four stages in the adult learning cycle: concrete experience, observation and reflection, generalisation and abstract conceptualisation, active experimentation. These make up his experiential learning cycle, which has been widely used and adapted in the last 20 years. Variations have been proposed by Argyris, who distinguished single loop from double loop learning: single loop learning is learning within the confines of a set of assumptions, while double-loop learning questions those assumptions (Jarvis 1987: 28).

Mezirow sees the role of reflection on our experience as enabling us to make ‘a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action’ (Mezirow 1990: 1). He distinguishes reflection in action – a pause to reassess what I am doing – from reflection on past action, which concentrates on the assumptions that were made. Within the latter he singles out “critical reflection” for particular attention. By this he means questioning our own presuppositions and meaning perspectives: ‘reassessing the way we have posed problems and reassessing our own orientation to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling, and acting’ (ibid: 13). This kind of perspective transformation may be initiated through anomalies (discontinuities between one’s assumptions and new knowledge) and by life transitions (divorce, death of a loved one, change in job status).

The relationship between reflection and action or experience is complex. Reflection is the process of interpreting experience, but also for both Kolb and Freire, lays the groundwork for future action. Freire uses the term “praxis” to show the relationship between thought and action.

The insistence that the oppressed engage in reflection on their concrete situation is not a call to armchair revolution. On the contrary, reflection – true reflection – leads to action. On the other hand, when a situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection.

(Pedagogy of the Oppressed, quoted in Jarvis, op cit.: 90)

It is through praxis that transformation occurs for Freire, a contrast to the internalised perspective on transformation imagined by Mezirow. But for both the root of transformation is in experience.

7.3 Acquiring and organising knowledge

Developments in cognitive science over the last 30 years have advanced our understanding of how the brain works and how learning takes place within it. Of particular importance for citizenship learning are research on memory and how the brain structures knowledge; on problem solving and reasoning; and on “metacognition” (self-monitoring of one’s performance and learning) (for a useful overview of research see Bransford *et al.* 1999).

Research on the brain shows two basic memory processes that take place in different areas of the brain: declarative memory, or memory for facts and events, and procedural memory, for skills and other cognitive operations (ibid: 112). Different features of learning contribute to the durability of memory: for example, people remember pictures longer than words.

But the brain is not a passive recorder: the mind creates categories for processing information:

Humans are viewed as goal-directed agents who actively seek information. They come to formal education with a range of prior knowledge, skills, beliefs, and concepts that significantly influence what they notice about the environment and how they organise and interpret it. This in turn affects their abilities to remember, reason, solve problems, and acquire new knowledge.

(ibid: 10)

People make links to other information, infer unstated ideas, and reframe ideas. In some experiments people consistently “remember” words that are implied but not stated; “false” memories can be as convincing as events that actually happened.

The structures that represent knowledge and reasoning within each individual brain are coherent. The brain organises knowledge by creating patterns and clusters, linked around core concepts or meanings. These patterns of existing knowledge underlie effective understanding and thinking. We acquire new knowledge by linking it to our existing knowledge and core concepts – tying it into the pattern. This is true even for young infants, who now must be viewed as active learners from (or before) birth. ‘In the most general sense, the contemporary view of learning is that people construct new knowledge and understandings based on what they already know and believe’ (ibid). On the other hand, creativity depends on us being able to think beyond existing patterns and concepts, to create new links and associations – to think “outside the box” or beyond it.

Research on problem solving and reasoning shows how people apply knowledge to solve problems and accomplish tasks. In particular, research on the differences between “novices” (beginners) and “experts” (people with proficiency in a particular area) suggest that it is not just the amount of knowledge that makes a difference, but how it is organised. Scribner’s (1984) ethnographic research on “practical intelligence” shows how experienced packers in a dairy processing plant develop highly sophisticated methods to work out how to pack crates to meet particular orders. Consistently, experienced workers in a practical setting were able to devise the “least effort” solutions to their packing problems. In their heads they could use mathematical operations in base 8 or 15 – but faced with a pencil and paper test on the very same mathematical operations were not able to solve them.

Problem solving requires us to understand the problem, retrieve useful knowledge, apply it and monitor the impact. Experts have well-organised knowledge bases that shape what they notice and how they represent problems. ‘Because of their ability to see patterns of meaningful information, experts begin problem solving “at a higher place” ’ (ibid: 36). While experts may have more knowledge than novices that is not necessarily important. Pattern recognition is key: it allows the expert to understand a problem in terms of core concepts or big ideas (novices tend to search for correct formulas and pat answers that fit their everyday intuitions), and to retrieve the important and useful knowledge from their memory. This process appears fluent and relatively effortless for an expert.

Metacognition – the ability to step back and monitor one’s thinking and reasoning – is an important part of expertise. ‘Experts step back from their first, oversimplistic interpretation of a problem or situation and question their own knowledge that is relevant’ (ibid: 38). As Bruner describes it, learning is ‘figuring out how to use what you already know in order to go beyond what you currently think . . . Knowing how something is put together is worth a thousand facts about it. It permits you to go beyond it’ (Bruner 1983: 183).

Some of the best adult education practice supports this process – by starting where people are, asking questions rather than telling, providing support rather than instruction, they demonstrate faith in the capacity of ordinary people to understand their situation and go beyond what they know to find solutions.

8 Conclusions

It is clear that whatever educators (and governments) intend, people are learning citizenship. They learn from socialisation into a political culture that shapes the possible and the impossible. They learn from participation (or lack of participation) in political and social processes. They learn from formal and informal efforts to educate them on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. But *what* they learn does not always make them more actively involved citizens. As Dewey argued in the 1930s, some experiences are miseducative: people learn to be passive or resistant, to expect little of their political leaders or to actively collude in corruption, graft and anti-democratic practices. Because people learn from everyday

experience, formal citizenship education efforts on their own cannot produce active citizens, especially when the political culture and everyday life experience send other messages.

The literature reviewed here suggests that many past efforts at adult and popular education have got a lot of things right – the emphasis on learning linked with experience, building on the social nature of learning through cultural expressions and group learning, the value of reflection are all reinforced in research on learning. There are also some new directions suggested, especially in relation to knowledge building, communities of practice and embedded learning. In this final overview we return to the three key citizenship attributes discussed in an early section: knowledge, abilities and dispositions. The interaction and overlap between these concepts will be apparent.

8.1 Knowledge (the role of frameworks for judgement and problem solving)

Knowledge is part of the core of what citizens need to learn. It is at the forefront of traditional civic education efforts, although just what that knowledge is, and in what form it is best conveyed, is contentious. There is a simplistic notion that knowledge is power, but as Shor argues, ‘knowledge is power only for those who can use it to change their conditions’ (1992: 6). Knowledge is needed to make judgements, but what is needed is an underlying framework of understanding about political choices, not specific facts or pieces of information. This approach recognises the value and validity of the understanding possessed by those who are experiencing a problem in deliberations about its solution. Whose knowledge, as well as what knowledge, needs to be acknowledged.

How are such frameworks of understanding developed? Research on how the brain takes in and stores knowledge help us understand how to approach citizen knowledge:

- Knowledge is stored in patterns or frameworks, and these shape both what people pay attention to in their environment and how they take in new knowledge. Knowledge is clustered around key concepts and ideas, and these “mental models” can be recognised and activated in facilitating learning.

Citizenship learning should help people acquire new knowledge by linking to the core concepts in their existing patterns of knowledge.

- Knowledge and experience are intertwined – our existing patterns of thinking shape how we experience, and our experiences shape our patterns of thinking. Providing new knowledge about democratic procedures, for example, without the experience of democratic participation is pointless – paper learning doesn’t work.

Citizenship learning should practice what it preaches, provide experiences of engaging in democracy not just information about it.

- Problem solving consists of understanding the problem and accessing relevant stored knowledge: people become more proficient in this with practice. Metacognition also helps people become more proficient problem solvers.

Citizenship learning should provide opportunities to practice problem solving and to become self-aware about their problem solving processes.

8.2 Abilities (the role of learning embedded in action and experience)

As progressive educators have argued for many years, the most effective learning is embedded in action, and above all group action. It is through action that we build our abilities, practice and develop them. But the relationship between learning and experience is not simple.

- Experience should not be reified – whatever is “out there” is always interpreted and reinterpreted, based on what we think we know and how we think. What we experience is shaped by who we are as people and the social context in which we experience it. In turn, experience shapes what we think we know and how we think. The dialectic is often unconscious but reflection can help us recognise the patterns.

Citizenship learning should provide opportunities to re-present experience in different ways, in order to deepen analysis and understanding.

- Practice allows us to build expertise. Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development” is a way of thinking about the “next do-able step” that is within a person’s capability – making demands beyond that results in failure and discouragement.

Citizenship education should allow spiral learning (revisiting and understanding at a deeper level), in order to facilitate growth and development.

- Apprenticeship is the process of assisted development of new community members to become more knowledgeable and proficient in the values and processes of the community.

Citizenship learning should provide “scaffolding” opportunities, in which those who are more experienced help novices with tasks that they cannot quite manage themselves, giving control back to the novice when he or she can manage alone.

- Reflection on experience provides a tool for metacognition, an important aspect of building expertise. It exists at many levels from a quick check in the middle of action to deeper examination of underlying assumptions and beliefs. All these levels are useful, but not all are appropriate at any given moment.

Citizenship learning should provide practice at all levels of reflection from immediate to deeper self-examination.

8.3 Dispositions (the role of social learning)

We understand more clearly now that a prime context for learning is within communities of practice – formally or informally constituted groups of people who do something together (work groups, family and friendship networks, voluntary associations, adult education groups and many others). Learning within these is accomplished as part of participating – we learn the ways things are done within the group, we learn the values, norms, language and styles, and we call on the group to help us accomplish our purposes. Above all, communities of practice are involved in creating meaning and identity: they may be primary means of sustaining alternative political cultures.

- Existing communities of practice are prime sites for citizenship learning when they provide opportunities to get involved in collective action on shared problems. Learning groups can be constituted as new communities of practice, given time and space to do so.

Citizenship learning can best be conducted in the context of communities of practice – establishing group norms, values, language, meanings and purposes.

- Talk is an important vehicle of creating communities, but not the only one – working together, playing together, cultural expressions of songs, drama and poetry all can create and reinforce communities of practice.

Citizenship learning should incorporate a range of cultural expressions and social activities to create the learning community.

- Underpinning citizenship are values, and these permeate political and social action. Citizen participation is not a technical or mechanical task.

Citizenship learning must engage with values.

9 Ways forward: challenges for educators

Learning cannot be designed, but it can be “designed for” (Wenger 1998). We can design infrastructures and processes that either facilitate or inhibit citizenship learning. This discussion paper has tried to review what we know about citizenship learning as a starting point for developing new approaches that go beyond our best efforts to date. It is a work in progress.

The challenges for educational practice in designing for citizenship learning are becoming clearer. We have to:

- Start where people are, with the mental models with which they view the world;
- Create communities of practice that provide the social contexts that support learning;
- Provide opportunities to act – and embed learning in the experiences;
- Provide opportunities to reflect, analyse and re-present experiences in order to deepen understanding;
- Enable people to create the knowledge frameworks that underpin judgements – and support knowledge with experiences (or knowledge-in-action);
- Ground both experience and learning in an understanding of values.

The importance of the link between experience and learning is reinforced by the literature reviewed here. It seems that, as we might have guessed, learning without putting it into practice does not impact long-term changes in knowledge and belief systems. And experience without the opportunity to make meaning of it (through reflection and re-presentation in social interaction) will not create self-aware and pro-active citizens. The challenge for educators is to integrate participation and learning, experience and knowledge, action and reflection.

The link between experience and learning reinforces the value of education that accompanies change efforts. It also highlights the importance of structural change in facilitating both action and learning. While educators focus on changing individuals, democratic theory suggests that while individuals must learn to exercise their rights, governance structures must provide opportunities to exercise these rights.

There are some practical ideas in the research on learning that can help us develop stronger citizenship learning opportunities. The idea of “scaffolding” is useful – in which more experienced people provide support for novices in tasks that are beyond their competence, handing back control as soon as possible. The “zone of proximal development” or next do-able step for developing members is also one that educators have often intuitively used in the past, and now can develop more explicitly. The spiral pattern of learning (rather than the Kolb version of a cycle) provides conceptual validation for repeating and deepening understanding over time. Above all, educators must take into account the social context for learning – the learning group itself and the broader society in which learning is acquired and applied. Values and norms of social engagement must be part of the educational process, not just the mechanics of participation.

One other lesson emerges from this review: that the research base for adult education is thin. New efforts to develop citizen learning, drawing on the research outlined here, should be accompanied by systematic research and documentation. This would allow the lessons learned from different efforts to be evaluated and shared with others. Such research requires baseline data (so that changes can be tracked) and longer term follow up (to look at changes in actual practice, not just knowledge and beliefs). With such research accompanying innovative practice we will build a knowledge base that should enable citizen education efforts of the future to become stronger and more effective.

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