Should schools provide ‘civic experiences’ to combat the ‘civic empowerment gap’?

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The importance of 'civic experiences'

Levison advocates the fundamental importance of *authentic* civic experiences to enable pupils to soar (2012 : 187) i.e. to develop a "sense of duty" (2012 : 189) as a civic apprentice (2012 : 191) to grow and be nurtured as a democratic citizen through civic empowerment. Importantly, pupils must identify positively with a model of civic community e.g. a school and/or educational institution (Levison, 2012 : 188 - 189) in order to cultivate specific civic skills e.g. diplomacy, ownership and ethno-racial relations - *amongst numerous others*. Levison (2012) promotes that all young people are offered opportunities and/or scenarios to observe, practice and develop civically whether intentionally or unintentionally with both positive and/or negative outcomes. Levison (2012) suggests a simple example of a positive, intentional opportunity - allowing for civic development - would be providing the framework for pupils to make and *be trusted to make* mistakes through the freedom of choice during schooling (Levison, 2012 : 178 - 179) to grab the responsibility of freedom (Levison, 2012 : 179) and the consequences of their actions (Levison, 2012 :177) e.g. pupils leaving class on their own initiative (Levison, 2012 :177). Contrastingly, Levison suggests a negative, intentional opportunity - allowing for civic development although through structured, reinforced disempowerment (2012 : 180) - would be denying and *not trusting* pupils with the developmental opportunity to "practice and model success" (2012 : 179) through making mistakes e.g. over-regulation of movement through a school (2012 : 177) and consequentially denying the freedom of choice (2012 : 179). Levison (2012) quantifies both civic developmental

opportunities as a matter of *trust* which are didactically transmitted from the establishment. Levison (2012) stipulates the first - positive, intentional opportunity - the freedom of choice, teaches pupils they *are* trusted, they *have* self-regulating capacity/potential and *can* model responsible citizenship. Importantly, Levison (2012) explains pupils may not always get this right and this is an essential learning curve for their civic development. The latter - negative, intentional opportunity primes pupils with a bleak and detrimental civic outlook affirming they *are not* trusted, *incapable* of developing self-regulation and responsible citizenship whilst damaging an individual's relationship with the state (Levison, 2012). Contributary to this concept, Levison delineates the impact of intentional and *unintentional* "civic microaggressions" (2012 : 176) and/or "civic microassaults" (2012 : 176) and thus the influence of civic experiences on an individual and ethno-racial groupings. These "microassaults" (Levison, 2012 : 176) are often unnoticed to both the perpetrator(s) and victim(s) and are short-lived but accumulative derogative and/or negative experiences against an individual's ethno-racial identity (Levison, 2012). Levison (2012 : 176) argues these *may* integrally damage civic identity through degradation of self-wellbeing. Levison demarcates an example of such "microassaults" (2012 : 176) through comparing the effect(s) of daily weapons screening at "low-income, predominantly minority schools" (2012 : 176) to White, middle-class pupils. Statistically, White, middle-class pupils are between four and ten times less likely to experience daily weapons screening (2012 : 176) and the accompanying "microassaults" (2012 : 176). Through this narrative, Levison (2012) highlights the core importance and effect of an individual's perceived image of oneself through a

public lens. Via these daily "microassaults" (2012 : 176) e.g. the weapons screening policy, pupils are perceived and inadvertently taught they are dangerous, *untrusted* and *incapable* of even attempting to be responsible citizens (Levison, 2012). Pupils are consequentially deprived of the opportunity to experientially develop civic skills e.g. self-regulation (Levison, 2012 : 178) which are indispensable within civic life with criminality automatically implied and assumed (Levison, 2012). Levison (2012) argues these negative factors contribute to expanding the 'civic empowerment gap'. However, Levinson (2012) demarcates that positive civic experiences potentially contract the 'civic empowerment gap'.

The importance of the 'civic empowerment gap'

Levison emphasises there is a "profound civic empowerment gap" (2012 : 31) between affluent White, middle-class, autochthonous citizens and ethno-racial minorities and/or impoverished citizens (2012 : 31). Essentially, the 'civic empowerment gap' constitutes breaches within "knowledge, skills, attitude, and participation" (Levison, 2012 : 49). Levison (2012 : 38 - 39) attributes this in-part to individual attitudes rooted within differing ethno-racial groupings, social classes and *trust.* For example, Levison (2012) asserts the inherent social-class disparities of *trust* between citizens and government. Through recanting pupils' paranoid September 11th, 2001 conspiracies Levison (2012) correlates this misguided rationale with the 'civic empowerment gap' e.g. racial inequality. Pupils were first and second-generation immigrants, non-White, impoverished and in reality segregated

through neighbourhood and thus schooling (Levison, 2012 : 31). Due to de facto segregation pupils were accustom to “negative interactions with representatives of governmental power” (Levison, 2012 : 31) e.g. law enforcement. Levison validates the “large and (…) disturbing” (2012 : 31) ‘civic empowerment gap’ statistically through ethno-racial academic attainment imbalances, presidential election(s) voting percentiles, disparity via income figures and individual political efficacy (Levison, 2012). This being stated, Levison affirms education, ethno-racial positioning and/or poverty does not *automatically* affect civic participation negatively (2012 : 47). Levison suggests recognising and tackling the ‘civic empowerment gap’ reduces the erosion of democracy (2012 : 49). Levison’s (2012) solutions to the ‘civic empowerment gap’ are critically evaluated in a latter part of this essay. Simply, privileged ethno-racial groupings have higher political efficacy e.g. the prosperous middle-class in comparison to impoverished, ethno-racial minorities (Levison, 2012 : 49). Bartels, 1999, as cited in Levison, (2012 : 49) states millions of citizens with the lowermost income brackets “have *no* discernible impact on the behaviour of their elected representative” (italics in original). Levison (2012) also acknowledges the unbalancing threat of prosperous donors to the democracy of the United States and the contributary expanding effect on the ‘civic empowerment gap’.

Critical appraisal

A central concept underpinning Levison’s (2012) writing is the notion of a ‘citizen’. Heater (1999 : 1) contemplates “citizenship [is] of cardinal significance”

although the definition of a ‘citizen’ and thus ‘citizenship’ is highly debated (Morris, 2018; Osler and Starkey 2005; Jones and Gaventa, 2002; Holston and Appadurai, 1996; Heater, 1999) and particularly contentious when considering current municipal anxiety and populist nationalism throughout Western Europe (Morris, 2018 : 7). There are deep-rooted, generational issues within ‘British’ society (McCrone and Kiely, 2000), McCrone and Kiely delineate the problematic dichotomies between “state (British) and national identities (English, Scottish, Welsh, etc.)” (2000 : 19). Contributory to this, ‘citizenship’ according to (Osler and Starkey, 2005 : 11) is an overcast and indistinct concept which is aspirational rather than a practical reality. McCrone and Kiely - whilst framing the UK within the European Union - stipulate “the doctrine of national sovereignty is being eroded significantly” (2000 : 20) and on a global-scale, Heater expands postulating “citizenship is still hollow and meaningless” (1999 : 3). This seemingly bleak outlook, in my opinion, underscores not only the importance of the ‘citizenship’ and by-extension, ‘civic experiences’ but also the surrounding and acknowledgeable civic-disengagement e.g. the UK’s decline in political voting (Dempsey and Loft, 2019a) or falling political party membership (Dempsey and Loft, 2019b). Unsurprisingly, these general civic-disengagement claims are refuted by the House of Lords stating “society engaged[s] harmoniously together” (Morris, 2018 : 2018).

Although, Tarozzie and Torres (2016 : 1) state “citizenship has always been about unity and homogeneity” there is significant duality underpinning ‘citizenship’ (Shachar, A., Bauböck, R., Bloemraad, I., and Vink, 2017; Heater, 1999). Firstly, a standpoint situated within civic republicanism e.g. the emphasis on civic-

responsibilities to constitute ‘citizenship’ (Shachar, A., Bauböck, R., Bloemraad, I., and Vink, 2017; Heater, 1999) e.g. paying taxes (Dagger, 2002). Secondly, the liberalist emphasis on civic-rights and/or civic-status’s (Searing, Conover and Crewe, 2003; Jones and Gaventa, 2002; Heater, 1999) e.g. access to voting rights (Osler and Starkey, 2005) and/or the welfare state (Heater, 1999). Importantly, ‘citizenship’ is not just the relationship between and individual and their country (Osler and Starkey, 2005) but Heater’s (1999 : 8) demarcation of an individual’s chronological *rights transcendence* from feudalism and capitalism. This transcendence chronologically leads to citizenship in its modern form e.g. ‘civic equality’ and ‘individual rights’ (Heater, 1999 : 8). Feudalism promoted a deferential, hierarchical relationship between an individual and the State (Heater, 1999 : 8). Capitalism built on this feudalistic foundation with an emerging class structure and promoted individual responsibility (Heater, 1999 : 8). This *transcendence* leads to experiencing belonging (Morris, 2018; Osler and Starkey, 2005) i.e. one’s and/or others perception of being “in place or out of place” (Kennelly, 2011 : 1).

Within literature, there are defining overarching commonalities of ‘citizenship’ i.e. sub-classifications of *individual rights, civic equality and national identity* (Levison, 2012; Isin, 2008; Heater, 1999; Holston and Appadurai, 1996). In addition when considering, ‘citizenship’ as a framework for “cardinal significance” (Heater, 1999 : 1), Holston and Appadurai (1996) form parallels with wider-society denoting *citizenship and nationality* are the foundations of a “full membership in society” (1996 : 187).

Notably, Osler (2005 : 1) postulates the continual evolution of ‘citizenship’ - coinciding with Heater’s (1999) societal *transcendence* as explored previously - leading to greater onus on individual participation (Osler, 2005 : 1). These factors harmonise with the current governmental position of a “democratic nation […] which everyone feels they can contribute” (Morris, 2018 : 4). Tarozzi and Torres (2016 : 16) highlight “the citizen is viewed as single, atomized, deprived of networks in which he or she is always located”. However, these individual contributions are accumulative, juxtaposing and, in my opinion, contributory to Osler’s (2005) global *but* divided society. These factors establish the importance of engaging individuals in meaningful civic discourse at the start of their individual civic journey’ e.g. through schooling as postulated by Levison (2012). Morris (2008), congruent to Levison (2012) states exposure and participation within civic discourse, civic experiences and engagement with more formalised ‘citizenship education’ *potentially* helps individuals comprehend and develop their place in society (Morris, 2008 : 27). Consequentially, democratic equality would also ensue (Morris, 2008 : 27) shortening the ‘civic empowerment gap’ (Levison, 2010). Fundamentally, this is achieved through addressing an assemblage of “cultural, social, political, and religious interests and beliefs” (Levison, 2010 : 316) and empowering pupils with confidence. They *have* the aptitude to be *trusted* (Levison, 2012). They *have* the aptitude to become accountable members of society (Levison, 2012). This ‘civic education’ would potentially lead to a more homogeneous and united society (Levison, 2010) moving away from Osler’s (2005) societal fragmentation. This concept is explored further in a latter part of this essay.

Dacombe recognises the decline in civic participation within the community and acknowledges that defining such participation is a “complex and demanding task” (2010 : 1) with a plethora of interpretations as the notion of ‘citizenship’ itself - *as explored above* - “is not an unchanging set of activities and attitudes” (Bennett, Wells and Rank, 2008). Additionally, Schudson (2006) states numerous academics and campaigner’s interpretation of civic life is too narrow and nostalgic of organisations that served society in preceding decades. This makes the evaluation of Levison’s (2012) advocation for *authentic* civic-experiences challenging e.g. the composition of both a civic experience and the reasoning of authenticity. Levison (2012 : 186) argues *intentionality, transparency* and *reflection* are essential for *authenticity* and thus underpin the presented arguments. However, this terminology and consequent reasoning, in my opinion, provides clear ambiguity open to individual interpretivism. Globally, individualism-collectivism is evolving (Santos, Varnum and Grossman, 2017; Fevre, 2016; Somek, 2008) e.g. the relationship between an individual and different societal groupings (Heery and Noon, 2017). Santos *et al.* (2017 : 2) also state there is an increasing “global trend towards individualism”. Fevre (2016) attributes the decline of collectivism to socio-ethnic inequality, neo-liberalism and *perhaps* the widening ‘civic empowerment gap’. This evolution highlights the importance of Levison’s (2012) modelling of *authentic* and politically emulating civic communities i.e. schools being potential power-houses of civic development (Levison, 2012). Santos *et al.* (2017) declaration of changing global trends is unconsidered by Levison (2012) although undoubtably affects the argument premise. Levison’s (2012) arguments are reminiscent of Schudson’s

(2006) nostalgic, narrow civic life and are non-aligning with modernistic trends e.g. evolving individualism-collectivism (Santos *et al.* 2017). Additionally, Dacombe (2012 : 1) states markers for civic participation e.g. political activism are not *automatically* markers of effective civic participation and therefore should not be *automatically* categorised as *authentic* civic experiences as denoted by Levison (2012). This potentially construes a mere pretence of civic empowerment and a pretence of *authentic* civic experiences. Levison (2012) argues against this pretence although ironically supports it due to the ambiguity of chosen terminology e.g. intentionality, transparency and reflection (Levison, 2012 : 186 - 187) and the interpretative nature of the definitions. This, in my opinion, inherently deflects away from developing effective civic identities clouding any interpretation of *authenticity*.

Whilst Levison (2012) fundamentally defines authoritative developmental posts in an individual's civic journey e.g. identifying positively with a model of civic community (2012 : 188 - 189), skills of diplomacy and ownership etc. (Levison, 2012) the affecting nature of civic experience, in my opinion, is more individualistic. However, this individualistic nature is ever-evolving, aligning with Santos *et al.* (2017) notion of embryonic individualism-collectivism - regardless of ethno-racial positioning. Bennett *et al.* 2008 also suggests civic engagement is approached and interpreted differently by younger citizens in comparison to their parents and/or teachers. This is in-part due to generationally differing learning styles e.g. rooted within a more modernistic "interactive, project-based, peer-to-peer networked

information sharing" approach (Bennett *et al.* 2008 : 108). This is in comparison the more didactic, text-based authoritative broadcast (Bennett *et al.* 2008 : 108) as experienced in preceding generations. Whilst these factors are relevant, I would argue pupils are more inclined to participate civically within a school e.g. running for school council through specific, individualistic and often personal responses/influences/motivations to civic experiences. Young people's relationships *and their respective ethno-racial groupings relationship* with the state is ever evolving, ever changing (Santos's *et al.,* 2017; Fevre's, 2016 and Somek's, 2008). A few years back, I had a pupil stating "I have been bullied at this school. I hate bullies. I want to make sure this doesn't happen to anyone! That's why I'm running for council". Although, an unpopular motive from certain cliques within the wider-school community - inclusive of the school administration - as 'bullying doesn't happen at our school' the pupil was empowered, with admirable conviction to challenge the modality of the institution. This is arguably an individualistic response borne from a negative, unintentional but irrespectively empowering and arguably *authentic* experience diminishing Fevre's (2016) notion of collectively. The pupils' empowerment does *partial* align with Levison's (2012 : 186 - 187) criteria of *intentionality, transparency* and *reflection* for *authentic* civic experiences although is situated from an individual's standpoint rather an institutions*. Intentionality:* the pupil deliberately chose to stand for council; *transparency:* the negative and unintended experiences from bullying digested and understood - although not in Levison's (2012 : 186) stipulated 'shared capacity' - and *reflection*: the pupils cyclically validated and mused further on all feedback, intentional/unintentional to benefit the wider civic

community through running for school council and achieving *authentic*, civic-empowerment.

Broom (2015) argues the primary force behind teaching should be to empower pupils as "power is the ability to influence one's environment" (2015 : 81). This empowerment should occur at the beginning of an individual's civic journey to enhance their relationship with the state (Morris, 2018). This empowerment is gained through *authentic* civic experiences (Levison, 2012) to allow for varied perspective, skills of negotiation, independent thinking, deepening the "very essence of democracy" (Broom, 2015 : 81) etc. Levison (2012) advocates for a schooling framework that allows pupils make mistakes and be *trusted* to make mistakes through freedom of choice. Freedom, to direct one's learning academically but importantly freedom to direct one's learning civically (Levison, 2012). This freedom builds confidence to cyclically inspire civic action (Broom, 2015). Levison (2012) states this freedom gives pupils the opportunity to "practice and model success" whilst developing civically (Levison, 2012 : 179) through developing self-regulation, a conception of accountability (Levison, 2012) as *effective* learning involves making mistakes (Dahlin, Chuange and Roulet, 2017; Haylock and Manning 2014 *etc.*). Levison (2012) sustains a substantial argument for a safe, proactive, civic confidence boosting and civic experimentation arena. In addition, I agree it is essential for civic experimentation to teach pupils their perceptions and ideas are valued (Levison, 2012) affirming they *are* trusted and *capable* contributing civically. Recently, I gave Year 6 pupils (aged between 10 and 11) the responsibility/accountability to practice, albeit learn a free choice of ukulele-based

musical song(s) in small groups within the classroom over a term. This facilitation is analogous of Bennett's *et al.* (2008 : 108) aforementioned interactive, project-central approach - a differing, more *modern*, more *relevant* approach to facilitate civic education in a younger generation. This musical project facilitated pupils with a collaborative and experiential (Levison, 2012) arena for negotiation, diplomacy and ownership development - the rudiments of social-interaction - the rudiments of living in society as a fledgling citizen (Crozier, 2014). Crozier takes this further and stipulates "this is [group based music making] education in its most fundamental form" (2014 : 3). Through making social blunders, founding occasionally problematic situations to diplomatically resolve (both individually and in collaboration with the facilitator/teacher), taking ownership and accountability (Levison, 2012) whilst reflecting on their actions and/or the project certain pupils became civically empowered. A few pupils - *linking back to Santos et al. (2017) conception of evolving individualism-collectivism and my aforementioned argument of the personal nature of civic action* - then formed their own band separate to the music department to cyclically inspire civic action (Broom, 2015). Pupils wrote and rehearsed their own song to highlight the effects and consequences of bullying before performing in a whole school assembly. This is *authentic* civic-empowerment aligning more adeptly with Levison's (2012) criterion; *intentionality:* the facilitated arena (classroom/musical project) to empower pupils civically; *transparency:* a shared and collaborative journey to categorise experiences and form a deeper understandin*g and reflection:* pupils sought feedback episodically over time (Levison, 2012 : 187). Importantly, pupils positively identified with the modelling of civic-community (Levison, 2012)

whilst evolving a sense of duty (Levison, 2012 : 189) to take forward in their civic lives.

Throughout Levison's (2012) writing the importance and potential power of civic experiences is highlighted. Importantly, whilst there are deliberate acts of leading to civic-empowerment there are non-deliberate acts with unintentional but disempowering outcomes (Levison, 2012). Levison outlines the concept of "civic microaggressions" (2012 : 176) - *see above* - although, Levison's argument is situated within ethno-racial minorities as anecdotes surrounding "poor youth of color" (2012 : 177) are reminisced. Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo and Rivera (2009 : 1) stipulate "any group can potentially be guilty of delivering racial microaggressions". Congruent with Levison (2012) and Blanton and Jaccard (2008) Sue, *et al.* (2009) also acknowledges that parties are often ignorant and/or unconscious of both the action - "the microassault" (Levison, 2012 : 176) - and the potentially civically disempowering outcomes (Sue *et al.* 2009). Contrastingly, Wong-Padoongpatt, Zane, Semie and Anne (2017), whilst investigating stress through racial microaggressions within Asian Americans, refute the claim that everyone has the potential to deliver racial microaggressions. Through my experience, I contest Wong-Paddongpatt's (2017) standpoint and Levison's (2012) ethno-racial positioning. Consistent with Sue *et al.* 2009 I agree that any ethno-racial group can perpetrate racial microaggressions and they have a profound effect on individuals and wider-society (Levison, 2012). At the beginning of my career I facilitated Music workshops in inner-city primary schools in Salford - with similar socio-demographics and pupil transit policies experienced by Levison (2012) - e.g. one of which with weapons

screening on entrance for *all* pupils and staff. The inter-personal relationships between *all* individuals were caught in a vicious cycle of civic-disempowerment (Levison, 2012) and were perpetrators of “microassault[s]” (Levison, 2012 : 176). To elicit further, this indicates the inter-personal relationships between; the institution and pupils, the institution and teachers, the teachers and pupils, the pupils and teacher, the pupils and their peers, the pupils and the wider-community *etc.* All parties were disengaged - pupils, teaching staff, leadership and the wider-community. A decade later, a situation still resonates whilst considering Levison’s (2012) writing. I naively questioned the weapons screening policy for *all* pupils and staff. A demoralized and exasperated Year 5 teacher replied, whilst quarrelling with a colleague on the policy “How can we educate if we’re not trusted? How can the staff trust pupils if we are not trusted as teachers? How can pupils trust anyone when we are teaching them to fundamentally mistrust everyone? How can the community trust everyone in the school when they see our metal detectors?”. Whilst delivering the workshops I was personally and unwittingly trapped in this vicious civic disempowerment cycle with the use of security creating a “prison-like atmosphere” (Addington, 2016 : 812). On reflection, this was *almost* an accepted culture within this school with consequentially assumed criminality and/or potential offending capacity (Addington, 2016; Levison, 2012). This was inadvertently promoted by all parties (including the pupils), irrespective of ethno-racial positioning and thus everyone perpetrated unconscious “civic microagressions” (Levison, 2016 : 176). Lilienfeld (2017) states that society has achieved progress whilst tackling racial prejudice although it is *still* a “troubling reality of modern life” (Lilienfeld, 2017 : 1).

The academic literature however, surrounding microaggressions is highly disputed due to the challenging, provocative and nature of the concept and reliability of research (Blanton and Jaccard, 2008). A majority of the research is laboratory based and/or positioned on hypothetical/theoretical scenarios rather than being positioned in the 'real world' (Blanton and Jaccard, 2008). This being stated, "civic microagressions" (Levison, 2012 : 176), in my opinion and experience affects all parties differently, the perpetrator, the victim, the bystander(s) etc.

Numerous academics acknowledge the 'civic empowerment gap' (Addington, 2016; Swalwell, 2015; Levison, 2012; Pope, Stolte and Cohen, 2011; etc.) and are congruent in definition and/or measures e.g. standardised testing. Swalwell's (2015 : 492) diagnoses the 'civic empowerment gap' as a matter of social class rather than cultural. Whilst I partially agree with this concept, I would argue that due to the deep-rooted nature of the 'civic empowerment gap' (Addington, 2016; Swalwell, 2015; Levison, 2012; Levison, 2010; Pope, Stolte and Cohen, 2011), in geographical pockets, certain civic experiences have enlarged the 'civic empowerment gap' over generations and therefore the 'civic empowerment gap' itself has become instilled ethno-racially and thus culturally e.g. the Salford schooling anecdote. Additionally, Pope *et al.* (2011 : 1) suggests that civic engagement has been nationally neglected due to emphasis on economic competitiveness and academic testing. This in another contributory factor broadening the 'civic empowerment gap' Pope *et al.* (2011). Consequentially, Pope *et al.* (2011 : 1) affirms there has been more traction addressing a young individual's literacy and maths rather than their civic engagement. This nationwide overview/trend - whilst not directly explored by

Levison, 2012 - is relevant to comprehend the ‘bigger picture’ and the evolving state of individualism-collectivism (Santos *et al.*, 2017). From a generalist perspective, Addington (2016 : 1) relays “civic knowledge and participation ~~are~~ [is] low among[st] all students” although exasperated within ethno-racial minorities (Addington, 2016). Current research uncovers noticeable trends between poverty-stricken areas and diminished civic engagement (Addington, 2016 : 1). These factors combine to extend and define the ‘civic empowerment gap’ with prosperity e.g. the typically White, middle-class, having a greater efficacy to affect governmental change (Addington, 2016; Levison, 2012). This is cyclically detrimental behaving similarly to the notion of “civic microaggressions” (Levison, 2012 : 176). Citizens are less likely to take civic-action (Bloom, 2015) through limited political efficacy due to ethno-racial and/or social-class (Swalwell, 2015) positioning. This is exasperated further by inner-city youths more likely to have regular *negative* exposure to governmental officials (Addington, 2016) due, in-part, to being victims of conscious and unconscious ‘civic microassaults’ (Levison, 2012) instilling a culture of mistrust in political systems and governmental officials (Addington, 2016; Levison, 2012). I agree with Addington’s (2016) and Levison’s (2012) consistent positioning that this culture of mistrust, from an individual’s standpoint, undermines their perceived value. They are effectively taught their voices are not valued therefore widening the ‘civic empowerment gap’ as they are less likely to take civic action (Bloom, 2015) through a disempowering relationship with the state and cyclically reinforced civic disengagement (Levison, 2012). Throughout my career I have worked at a variety of contrasting organisations. During my time working at Salford inner-city schools I also worked for the Hallé

Concerts Society in their Youth Ensembles Programmes. During this segment of my career Levison's (2012) 'civic empowerment gap' was the most unmistakable. One day, I would be working with children from ethno-racial minorities in the most deprived areas of Salford and within the 20% most deprived areas nationally (Public Health England, 2018 : 1) e.g. Broughton (Salford City Council, 2015). Pupils and staff generally had perceptibly limited aspirations and limited civic engagement with a surrounding culture leaving diminutive opportunity for civic empowerment. The following day, I would be working with some of the most privileged and affluent children within Greater Manchester - predominately and strikingly the White middle-class - a majority of which attended private schooling. The Salford schooling, and cyclically disempowering engagement - *as discussed previously* - akin to Levison (2012 : 179) equipped pupils for "experientially for low-income jobs". Levison (2012) fixates on the financial outcomes of schooling. In my opinion, Levison (2012) implies low-income equates to low-levels of skills. This is simply not the case. Low income and high levels of skills often correlate e.g. academics, teachers, healthcare professionals and musicians etc. I would suggest, the Salford schooling equips pupils experientially for low-skilled predominantly service and/or manual jobs e.g. those with less creativity involved. Whereas, the Hallé's programme boosted confidence, explored an array of potential maxing, creative - *but not necessarily high-income* - career options allowing participants to "soar" (Levison, 2012 : 187). The Hallé inadvertently developed elevated, transferable (Levison, 2012 : 187) civic skills e.g. diplomacy and teamwork alongside recognising children's voices and/or ideas through the music-making process. Tragically, many of the pupils that I worked

with within Salford would not have access to this opportunity due to their ethno-social status and *particularly* limited financial means and civic outlook. Notably, all places on the Hallé's programme were allotted on audition merit. Those that were awarded places *generally*, were more advanced, musically literate academically and practically and therefore accomplished. This, in my professional and personal experience, is generally gained through families funding a variety of instrumental/singing music lessons, musical and non-musical extra-curricular activities and submersing their children within middle-class culture(s). Pupils from the Salford schools i.e. on the opposite end of the 'civic empowerment gap' are just as capable but would have not experienced the financial input and middle-class outlook. This unfortunately leads to a non-comparable level of musical accomplishment denying pupils the opportunity to be caught in the Hallé's 'cycle of empowerment'.

For the strength of the constitution and "quality of the United States" (Levison, 2012 : 49) Levison states it is essential to develop procedures to contract the 'civic empowerment gap' (2012). This involves increasing civic equality (Levison, 2012) to concurrently heighten "political stability, [and] democratic legitimacy" (Levison, 2012 : 51). Levison (2012) suggests tackling the inherent ethno-racial constitution of schooling. Levison (2012) positions de facto segregation within schooling and wider-communities promotes isolation and consequentially limits interaction between ethno-racial groupings e.g. the "poor and non-White students" (Levison, 2012 : 50) and "middle-class and wealthy White students" Levison, 2012 :50). A more relevant, cohesive, ethno-racial foundation creates the "most diverse deliberative space possible" Hess and McAvoy (2015 : 107) and in my opinion promotes civic learning

through a more accurate depiction of civic life. Developing civically and therefore contracting the ‘civic empowerment gap’ *could also* encourage citizen motivation and by extension, outlook and *perhaps* enhance academic performance (Pope *et al.*, 2011). Swalwell (2015) argues that tackling Levison’s (2012) notion of de facto ethno-racial segregation is only addressing the “*symptoms* of a much deeper structural problem” (Swalwell, 2015 : 506, my italics). In my opinion, Swalwell’s (2015) assertion suggests the issues are with very fabric of social hierarchy. Compounding this, Manstead (2018) elicits the lasting and *inhibiting* psychological impact of the social circumstances an individual grows up in. This, in my opinion, leads to an elongation of the ‘civic empowerment gap’ cyclically entrenching this deeper into culture through bridging generations and Wertsch’s (2002) notion of ‘collective remembrance’. Levison (2012) also suggests an reinstatement and overhaul - both budgetary and experiential programme content - of ‘civic education’ diverting away from teaching the mechanics of governmental and/or egalitarian systems. Coincidingly, Addington (2016) advocates developing a more effective ‘civic curriculum’ particularly for/within deprived areas. Interestingly, Addington (2016) suggests that pupils have a predisposed interest in empowerment and their fundamental human-rights. Congruent to this Crittenden and Levine (2018 : 1) find when pupils are young, habitual civic values are easier to influence and/or modify. Combining these factors suggests civic education and/or developing civic curricula would be more effective during schooling i.e. at the start of an individual’s civic journey. Levison (2012) states civic education should share a common, accountable vision whilst being fundamentally interdisciplinary, experiential - rather than text-book

abstractions - and relevant e.g. more reflective of the experience of “low-income youth” (Levison, 2012 : 53). Addington (2016), whilst agreeing with Levison (2012) adds that pupils’ individual circumstances and/or needs(s) should be integrated. This is congruent to my aforementioned argument of the individualistic effects of civic experiences. Levison (2012) also infers increasing effectiveness by teaching with a modern style e.g. interactivity and project-centred approaches as delineated by Bennett *et al.* (2008). As with other subjects e.g. Maths and/or English etc. I agree such programmes should be regular and over an extended period (Levison, 2012) whilst interwoven academically (Pope *et al.*, 2011) for mastery of the practice (Levison, 2012) rather than as an isolated unit. It is also imperative to interweave open but ethical discussion of civic problems (Crittenden and Levine, 2018; Guilfoil and Delanda, 2014; Hess, and McAvoy, 2015) and as stipulated by Levison, 2012. Aside from this formal, intentional approach, the previously discussed effectiveness of civic empowerment through the fundamental framework of a school e.g. through freedom of choice (Levison, 2012) or pupils participating in school governance (Guilfoil and Delanda, 2014; Levison, 2012) etc. as schooling “exerts a profound effect and students’ and adults’ civic experiences” (Levison, 2012 : 56).

Whilst Levison’s (2012) standpoints are certainly not conclusive they critically highlight fundamental aspects of an individual’s civic development from civic experiences and empowerment outcomes through to solutions to contract the ‘civic empowerment gap’.

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