



Mind the gap:

Youth civic engagement and empowerment

Civic 'gaps' defined

- Civic *achievement* gap
 - A gap in civic and political knowledge and skills.
- Civic *opportunity* gap
 - A gap in opportunities presented through learning and the community for civic and citizenship participation.
- Civic *engagement* gap
 - A gap between those who choose to (are able to) engage with civic and political opportunities.
- Civic *empowerment* gap
 - A gap in political and civic efficacy, behaviour and participation founded upon the feeling that one can be involved/make a difference.

What does this gap involve?

“The privileged participate more than others and are increasingly well organized to press their demands on government ... Citizens with low or moderate incomes speak with a whisper that is lost on the ears of inattentive government, while the advantaged roar with the clarity and consistency that policymakers readily heed.”

- American Political Science Taskforce on Inequality and American Democracy (2004)

Evidence from US

- **Civic opportunities**

- A student's race, academic track and school's average socio-economic status (SES) determines the availability of the school-based opportunities that promote civic engagement. (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008)
- E.G: Compared with students of average SES, those with higher SES were:
 - 2.03 times more likely to report studying how laws were made
 - 1.89 more likely to report participating in service learning activities
 - 1.42 times more likely to report that they had debates, panels, open discussion of political issues in their learning. (IEA, 2007 study)
- People who are poor and non-White are demonstrably less likely to develop traditional civic skills via education, the workplace, or participation in voluntary organisations (Levinson, 2010).

Evidence from US

- **Civic empowerment**

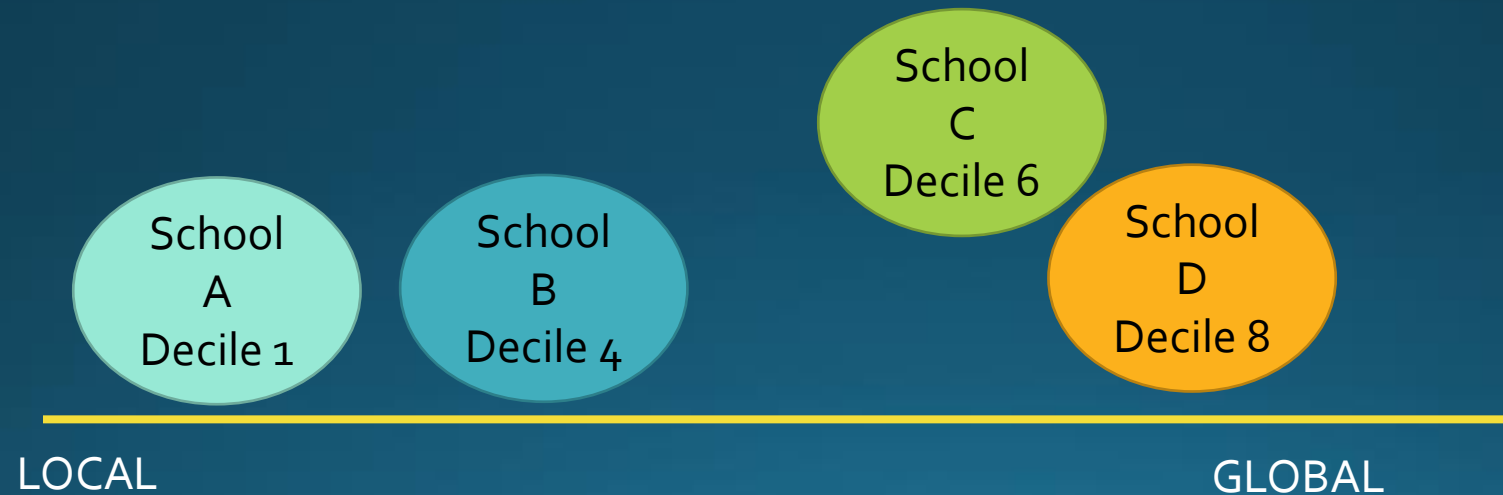
- Higher income families were:
 - Four as likely to be part of campaign work
 - Three times as likely to do informal community work
 - Twice as likely to contact elected officials
 - Twice as likely to protest
 - Six times as likely to sit on a board. (Verba, Scholzman & Brady, 1995)
- There is a profound civic empowerment gap in the US that disproportionately muffles the voices of non-White, foreign-born, and especially low-income citizens and amplifies the voices of White, native-born, and especially wealthy citizens. (Levinson, 2010, p. 331).

Evidence of 'gaps' from NZ

- Civic achievement gap
 - 14 year olds civic knowledge was significantly above average
 - BUT gap between high and low achievers was one of the most marked in study
 - Gender gap – girls mean score significantly higher than boys
 - Ethnicity – European and Asian significantly higher than Maori/Pacific nations
 - 2010 IEA ICCS study (38 countries) (Lang, 2010, p. 9)

Civic opportunity gap

Spatial orientations of citizenship education



Bron: So, this is your school here – what this shows is that your focus on issues is mostly at the local area. Can you help me to explain that?

Student 1: Well, that's because our community is so important to us. Our students know our community well.

Student 2: Like, what kind of community are they (pointing to School A)?

Bron: Decile 6, mostly European, reasonably well off...

Student 1: Well then, they would see less issues in their community.

Student 2: Cos we have more issues than them, we see more issues

Student 3: Our students don't travel so far (as them). Our world is smaller. They would connect more with the world than us.

Civic empowerment gap

- Bronwyn: Do you think your Council values your voices?
- Student (Decile 1 school): Nah [laughs]. We're not famous enough.





Andrew Little @AndrewLittle... · 28/07/17 ▾

Met a wonderful group of @HorowhenuaCoL students at our Levin public meeting tonite. Many thoughtful questions. Good luck with studies.



- Miriama: At class that's where I kind of feel different 'cause there's lots of other nationalities and religions...(Māori, age 14, Decile 10+ school)

Decile 1 teachers' views:

Teacher 1: And belief in themselves as well so...I face deficit thinking every day [so students don't believe in themselves]. So for me and for [my school and community], enabling or affecting policy change within our school is difficult because student voice is minimal.

A key challenge for me is engaging students who have legit reasons to not care, e.g, lived in a refugee camp, lived in poverty, parents in Mob, abuse, don't believe they will ever be anything beyond a Porirua kid.

Teacher 2: I have to start with a lot of work on their belief that they will be able to make a difference. And we do a lot of work on the belief that people are agents of change before we even begin.

Participatory capital

- Drawing on Bourdieu's conceptual triad and his species of capital...

Participatory capital = i.e. members of a school community [field] adhered to a shared habitus of citizenship participation that reflected the combined and interrelated social, economic and cultural capital, or 'participatory capital' within a school community.

- Wood, B. E. (2013). Participatory capital: Bourdieu and citizenship education in diverse school communities. *British journal of Sociology of Education*, 35(4), 578-597. doi:10.1080/01425692.2013.777209

When and where is civic learning most powerful?

- When it is authentic, topical and meaningful
 - Intersection of knowledge and engagement
 - Involves issues of personal and social significance
 - Involves real people and real places
- When students had deep knowledge about the social issue – their social actions were more significant, aligned and meaningful.
 - Wood et al., 2017.

References



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