
Theory Versus Practice: Exploring the role of volunteering in engendering citizenship

Steven Howlett and Angela Ellis

Institute for Volunteering Research

*Paper prepared for the 5th International Conference of The International
Society For Third-Sector Research (ISTR)*

University of Capetown

Capetown, South Africa

July 7-10, 2002

Abstract

Within the UK, the 1997 National Survey of Volunteering highlighted a decline in the overall number of volunteers. Of particular concern was the trend in young people volunteering, which had declined sharply since 1991 (Davis Smith, 1998). The survey stirred up further controversy as it showed more negative views of volunteering among the younger generation than older age groups (Gaskin, 1998).

This downward spiral in participation came at a time when interest in volunteering by the British government was increasing. Volunteering was seen as a key route to, and indicator of, active citizenship, and as such government has invested time and resources in volunteer promotion.

Focusing on young people's volunteering, this paper will explore three key questions of: Why, at this time, has volunteering gained such precedence? How has volunteering been linked into citizenship policies? and Does volunteering make good citizens: what is its link to citizenship?

In order to address these questions, we shall draw on experiences of evaluating a key government programme to promote young people's volunteering, called Millennium Volunteers.

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1. Introduction

During a speech to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations' (NCVO) annual conference in 1999, the UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair, asked a fundamental question; What kind of a society do you want to live in? (Blair 1999). The impetus for the question was his analysis that somehow society had lost its way, and that people had lost sight of what it means to live together. Indeed, just before his party won the 1997 general election, Blair had already identified one of the tasks his government would face:

To rebuild a sense of civic pride and responsibility out of the chaos of lawlessness and social breakdown around us (Blair 1996:18)

It's a theme that seems all too common and can be found in the speeches of politicians in many nations. The reception that the work of Robert Putnam (2000) has received internationally is testament to this. The argument that people are associating less with each other has struck a chord with a great many people as an explanation for what they see happening to society.

Blair's speech, in which he asked the question of what kind of society we wanted to live in, was a call for people to take action, to participate and re-build trust in their communities, and to create a new sense of citizenship. Over the next two years Blair was followed by Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Brown 2000), and David Blunkett (Blunkett 2001a), the Home Secretary, in outlining how important the third sector and volunteering were in achieving these government goals.

At the same time, however, the UK was experiencing a decline in the overall number of volunteers, reported, for example, in the 1997 National Survey of Volunteering. In particular young people's volunteering had declined sharply since the previous survey in 1991 (Davis Smith, 1998). The 1997 survey stirred up further controversy as it showed more negative views of volunteering among the younger generations than older age groups (Gaskin, 1998). Given the government's new passion for volunteering, these downward trends must have been of particular concern.

In an attempt to counteract these trends the government introduced a number of programmes; key for young people was the Millennium Volunteers programme. On one level the Millennium Volunteers programme is a mechanism to get young people aged 16-24 into volunteering. But on another level, the programme, as it was initially presented as a 'citizen's service', put forward that it would 'enable young people to accept their responsibilities as well as the rights which they expect from society' (Blunkett and Kilfoyle 1996:1). As such, beyond boosting the numbers of volunteers active in the UK, MV sought to provoke citizenship within young people. This can be seen as the 'learning through practice' approach to engendering citizenship. How exactly this would be achieved, and how the links were made from volunteering to citizenship were left undefined, other than a leap of faith that becoming an MV teaches young people something about rights and responsibilities.

At the same time, Blair's government introduced educating for citizenship into the school curriculum. Although largely to be taught through classroom-based lessons, pilot projects are underway to examine how community voluntary action can augment citizenship education. Such citizenship education is aimed at school-children up to the age of 16 but it is hoped that many will become the MVs of the future.

Both MV and citizenship education are attempts to develop a more systematic approach to civic education, a move which Alton (2001a) contends was needed in order to address a reality in which such learning to become 'good citizens' had previously been incidental for young people - depending on who they met and what organisations they got involved in. Within both there are assumptions about how volunteering can enhance citizenship. By using some work on evaluating the Millennium Volunteers programme (Davis Smith, Ellis and Howlett 2002), this paper shall raise three far broader key questions: Why is volunteering and the third sector so central to the government's citizenship and community agenda? What is being asked of volunteering? And can volunteering possibly deliver? It is not the aim of this paper to provide conclusive answers to these questions, but rather to stimulate some discussion around them.

2. Citizen volunteers

The idea of some form of volunteering as a part of education is not new; in the early 1960s many schools put community service on the curriculum. An important recurring point of this was the idea that volunteering could encourage pro-social behaviour as a 'means of social control for disaffected youth and others for whom 'the system has failed'' (Sheard 1986).

Further government policies were not forthcoming in drawing out the strategic potential of volunteering to build better communities. In the late 1970s Labour introduced its 'Good Neighbour Campaign' (Davis Smith 1998), but this did not survive the advent of the first Thatcher government in 1979. It was during this time that the role of the third sector in relation to government policy altered. The sector was thrust into centre stage, while at the same time never being allowed to feel more than a junior partner (Harris, Rochester and Halfpenny 2001). Voluntary organisations became mainstream deliverers of local services as the state began to deliver less and voluntary agencies stepped in to fill the gap. While it was mostly still state money paying for services, voluntary agencies were seen to have qualities that the government liked (and not to have many of the bureaucratic traits the government despised).

Ten years later the Conservatives introduced their idea of *active citizenship* acknowledging that the voluntary sector was not only about service delivery but was also an area (along with volunteering in other sectors) where people came together for the common good. It also signalled a renewed interest in citizenship, which for a long time had lain dormant¹. Steeped as they were in a liberal interpretation of society in which freedom was the *leitmotif* of their political agenda, this idea was a 'central part of their attempt to blunt the effect of the economic individualism which they espouse elsewhere' (Plant 1991). It was also a moment when volunteering started to excite government as a way for *active citizens* to be engaged. Simultaneously, it marked a significant point at which political

¹ After the second world war with a new found focus on equality and during the 1960s with much emphasis put on social rights these were hot issues. Then for a long period 'citizenship could scarcely have been described as a central issue on the political agenda' (Held 1991:19).

parties stopped emphasising the rights of citizenship and started to talk of responsibilities, duties and obligations. It is a view of citizenship that leans heavily towards a social conservative/communitarian perspective that is reigning people in from expecting rights without an appreciation of obligations. When John Major succeeded Margaret Thatcher his contribution was the Make a Difference initiative, which had its roots in talk of 'active citizenship'. The programme sort to encourage volunteering through small projects and had a national helpline to direct potential volunteers to opportunities (Davis Smith 1998)

Blair's approach represents something of continuity and change over this. While there is still a role for voluntary agencies and volunteers in service delivery, and in encouraging philanthropy, Blair also emphasises self-help and mutual support (Davis Smith 1999). Blair has begun to focus on how people get involved in communities through volunteering and voluntary organisations; but is also concerned with a wider question of how individuals see such voluntary action as a part of being citizens in the UK. The third sector, and especially volunteering, became important to government because both are vehicles to progress ideas of citizenship. Indeed, the central importance of volunteering was focussed upon sharply when Alun Michael as Home Office Minister (and subsequently repeated in a variety of roles) called volunteering 'the essential act of citizenship' (Michael 1998).

3. The Path from Volunteering to Citizenship

How to implement programmes to achieve this is another matter. Policies for active citizenship from both Conservative and Labour governments have so far failed demonstrate how programmes to support volunteering enriches citizenship, other than increasing the general stock of social capital.

According to Lister (1995), three dominant understandings of citizenship can be identified. Classical theories focus on a rights based discourse in which individual civic, political and social rights are to the fore. The second, 'duties' discourse focuses on citizen's obligations, or responsibilities. Thirdly, the 'active citizen' discourse focused on public participation in community and politics - citizenship rights were rewarded to those who took on board their responsibilities to participate.

Major's vision of a society at ease with itself, of warm beer and church bells conjures an image in which active citizens pander to stereotypical notions of who volunteers. Dean notes that those who have attempted to 'play' with citizenship have rarely acknowledged that it is a 'fundamentally contested concept' (Dean, 1999:213) and have done little to clarify exactly what they mean by it. If Major was thinking about those who for who his vision of Britain resonated as his active citizens then he was speaking to a small audience. Major's *active citizen* belong's to the second of Lister's categories in which people recognise their duties.

Blair's citizen belongs to the third category. They are citizens who engage at all levels. Since his election as Prime Minister in 1997, citizenship has become an important element in Tony Blair's vision for Britain. Blair is bringing his focus to a form of citizenship in which the relationship between citizen's rights and responsibly are central, but more precisely he is concerned with 'the chemistry of good citizenship which enables communities to operate successful' (Alton, 2001b:xiii). Its appeal for Blair must be seen partly in the idea that arguments about responsibility defy being characterised as left or right wing as they 'challenge both the amorality of the market and the diffusion of responsibility

brought about by large-scale industrial socialism' (Mulgan 1991:37-38), as such citizenship policies can cut loose of the much of the remnants of Labour ideology. Its attraction must also be seen in light of Blair's appeal to his values of Christianity and a fundamental belief in communities and in personal responsibility over political ideology (Naughtie 2001: 19-20).

Volunteering has become an important part of this debate because it represents one way in which people participate in their communities and learn about becoming responsible citizens who accept that obligations go hand in hand with the rights of citizenships. Labour's vigorous support for volunteering was underlined when Home Secretary David Blunkett outlined his views in an article to mark 2001 the UN International Year of Volunteers:

'Volunteering empowers people. It is rewarding for individuals. It cuts across divides of age, race and gender which isolate and alienate people. It strengthens the bonds between individuals which are the bedrock of a strong civil society. And in doing so it helps create a sense of citizenship that is often missing from so many of our communities today.

That kind of active citizenship is essential for the continued health of our democracy. Those who have a stake in the community around them respond entirely differently in their behaviour to the rest of the community than those who do not' (Blunkett 2001:4)

Such enthusiasm had already encouraged Justin Davis Smith (2000) to note that although we should not lose site of some tough issues facing volunteering in the UK, support from government was strong,

'Never before has government taken such an interest in it. Never before has volunteering been held in such high esteem. Never has volunteering appeared to better chime in with the spirit of the age, with its emphasis on small government and on individual expression and empowerment'

Volunteering has also become a part of strategies to introduce citizenship education in schools. David Blunkett when Secretary of State for Education set up a Committee under Professor Bernard Crick to report on a way forward for citizenship education. The report talks of three areas:

- Social and moral responsibility: learning self confidence and socially and morally responsible behaviour;
- Community involvement: becoming helpfully involved in the life and concerns of the community including community involvement and service;
- Political literacy: learning about institutions, issues, problems and practices of our democracy and how citizens can make themselves effective in public life locally, regionally and nationally, through skills and values as well as knowledge.

(Blunkett 2001c:129-130; Gerlach 2001)

Emphasising community involvement has led to proposals for volunteering to be part of the strategies schools employ to fulfil this aspect of the curriculum. However schools are not obliged to do this.

It is clear that citizenship has become a core concern of government, and that volunteering has been presented as one mechanism of achieving it. But, where does this leave us in an assessment of what is required of volunteering in general and of its connection with citizenship in particular? What does the Blair project mean when it argues for a programme that promotes better citizens? There is a concern in this in relation to another of Blair's belief in 'What counts, is what works'; put simply, without clear objectives how do we know what works? Our fear is that volunteering might be seen to not deliver. Of course, even if clear concepts were in place it is possible that volunteering would not be the right vehicle to achieve these. As a consequence we would like to start thinking about defining how volunteering does contribute to communities to be pro-active towards government and policy makers, without however restricting the benefits of volunteering to the language of citizenship.

Whilst looking at 'what works' is an asset in empirically grounded policy making, since shedding itself of its historic ideologies, Labour is perceived to lack a defining philosophy to underpin its approach to governance and policy making. Blair's government is now, in the last resort, rather pragmatic². Clearly this is a stylised account of policy making; but the point to make is that it is not unusual to find policy made without reference to a clearly thought out theoretical or philosophical approach.

3. Millennium Volunteers

The range of programmes put in place to support volunteering and the level of government funding that they receive illustrates the support the Blair government has been giving to volunteering.. For example, the government has been a major funder of an initiative called TimeBank which is designed to recruit volunteers through television and provides an internet based volunteer promotion and brokerage scheme (although the term volunteering has been replaced by giving time). Some £27 million has been allocated to English universities to involve students in their communities. The Experience Corps has been developed to attract older people to volunteering; while Millennium Volunteers focused on younger people, and a BME twinning in which BME volunteer involving organisations were linked to mainstream organisations for a mutually beneficial relationship. Various grants programmes have also been established such as the Active Community Unit's grants programme for small community groups doing work in their communities.

The Millennium Volunteers programme was originally conceived when Labour were in opposition. Two Members of Parliament with a long-standing interest in volunteering wrote a proposal for a 'Citizens' Service' (Blunkett and Kilfoyle 1996). They were concerned that without addressing the needs of young people 'We are in danger of excluding a substantial proportion of young people from the values, culture and commitment of a modern society'. They argued that a citizen's service would enable young people to improve their skills, develop a new sense of *responsibility* and reinforce their sense of belonging.

Millennium Volunteers can be examined in the light of these broader government objectives: a programme to introduce young people into working within their community, to see it as a chance to

² Scholars of government and policy making would note however that even with clearer ideological steering British government has often been pragmatic. Indeed Prime Ministers who have chosen and pursued doctrine indefatigably are seen as the exception (Hennessey 1996:13).

involve themselves and learn, but also an expression of their commitment to their communities. As such it is a programme that typifies Blair's values.

On the surface, however, the programme aimed generally to address what research had seemed to suggest - young people have a vacillating relationship with volunteering. The 1997 National Survey of Volunteering (Davis Smith 1998) showed a fall in the number of young people involving themselves in the community as volunteers. Between 1991 and 1997 participation rates of people between 18 and 24 years of age fell from 55 per cent to 43 per cent, with the hours devoted to voluntary work by this age group falling from an average of 2.7 hours to 0.7 hours per week. The survey also showed that young people gave less time than any other age group. Volunteers in the nearly all other age groups contributed on average at least five times as many hours of volunteering per week³.

Young people were also less satisfied with their volunteering. Presented with a list of ten possible drawbacks to volunteering young people gave the highest dissatisfaction ratings in six of the categories. They were particularly critical of the way they were organised in their volunteering, the lack of appreciation and recognition they received and the type of tasks they were asked to do (Davis Smith, 1999).

At the same time, across the whole of Europe, as Hannam (2001) identifies, evidence was suggesting that young people had 'little interest or knowledge in their democratic systems of government', causing widespread political concern. 18-25 year olds were increasingly less likely to vote in elections or to join main stream political parties.

It was within this context of declining civic and political participation by young people, that on achieving office Labour acted upon the suggestions of Blunkett and Kilfoyle and implemented their citizen's service programme for young people. The resulting scheme became known as the Millennium Volunteers programme (MV).

MV was officially launched in 1999 with an initial £52 million of government funding spread over a three-year period to promote and sustain volunteering among young people aged 16-24. While substantively being a UK-wide programme, the delivery structures and methods have varied between the four home countries. In England the government have retained ownership of the programme, delivering it from the new Millennium Volunteers Unit within the Department for Education and Skills (DfES); in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales the responsibility for running the programme has been devolved to the voluntary sector. In England the allocated funding and the targets that were established were at a premium; with the government setting a target of involving 100,000 young people as MVs by 2004. In Northern Ireland a more modest target of involving 820 young people was established; in Scotland the aim was to have 1,000 young people having volunteered 200 hours MVs by 2002. Interestingly in Wales no formal targets were established.

Officially the programme aimed to:

³ Other studies, however, have been less pessimistic. For example, a study conducted with 14-16 years old in schools in England found more than half of the sample was involved in some form of volunteering or campaigning (Roker, Player & Coleman 1999), with 1 in 7 of the sample involved in regular voluntary activity.

- Increase the number and range of both volunteering opportunities which meet the MV principles and the organisations offering opportunities;
- Enable young people to gain national recognition for their voluntary activity by achieving the MV Award of Excellence [for 200 hours of voluntary work] and encourage and support growing numbers of young people to take up MV opportunities;
- Bring added value to the community by completed projects and to young people in terms of their personal development and skills.

More specifically nine key principles were devised to provide a framework for the programme's delivery:

- Sustained personal commitment: To be a Millennium Volunteer young people are asked to make a sustained personal commitment to volunteering of no fewer than 200 hours over a period of one year.
- Community benefit: The programme aims to meet the needs of, and to be of benefit to, the local community.
- Voluntary involvement: Participation by young people within the programme is entirely voluntary.
- Inclusiveness: The programme aims to include young people who have not previously been involved in volunteering and those who have experienced social exclusion.
- Ownership by young people: Millennium Volunteers aims to encourage young people to take decisions about their volunteering activities and become involved in the running of projects.
- Variety: The programme aims to offer a diverse range of opportunities.
- Partnership: To become involved in the programme, projects are encouraged to establish partnerships with other organisations and agencies.
- Quality: Opportunities available to young people should be of a high quality, delivering a quality experience for young people.
- Recognition: Young people are awarded a Certificate after the completion of 100 hours of volunteering, and the Award of Excellence after the completion of 200 hours.

The programme was sold to young people very much on the basis on the individual benefits that they could receive for their participation. Young people were encouraged to 'build on what you're into' within their voluntary activities with the subsequent prospect of enhancing their employability with an 'MV for your CV'. Gone was the explicit reference to a citizen's services, or any explicit links between volunteering in MV and citizenship, or between civic participation and political participation. And yet, reading how politicians are presenting citizenship we see how the connection with volunteering is being made (for example see Michael 1998, Blunkett 2001b). The dilemma of co-joining theory and practice is illustrated by Jack Straw who, when Home Secretary, noted that young people probably do not think about citizenship very much (Straw 2001:136). This was confirmed in a study of young people in transition to citizenship that noted the language of citizenship was not meaningful for young people, however the essence was (Lister et al 2002). The inference is that, in practice, young people have ideas of citizenship, but this is not matched in reflection. Straw goes on to note that giving people a solid idea of citizenship is helpful:

'Once the broad concept of citizenship is established in citizen's minds, it becomes much easier to develop the idea of citizenship in an active sense – i.e. how people can give

something back to the community by voluntary activity and end up receiving much more than they have given' (Straw 2001: 139-140)

In essence this crystallises the central point of this paper, that if volunteering is to play a part in citizenship it needs better thinking through. At the moment there is too much reliance on the idea that 'we learn to participate through participating' (Pateman 1970), MV assumes that citizenship will materialise through involvement without - as Straw argues - a broad concept of what it is to achieve.

As of the end of March 2002 nearly 60,000 young people had signed up to become Millennium Volunteers; of these over 13,000 had achieved their 200 hours Awards of Excellence.

What we do and don't know about the impact of MV

An evaluation of the MV programme undertaken by the Institute for Volunteering Research (Davis Smith, Ellis and Howlett, 2002) highlighted a range of impacts that involvement in the programme had on young people and the wider community. The extent to which impact indicators used to assess the 'community benefit' of the programme can (or, indeed, should) be translated to proxy measures of citizenship will now be discussed.

One of the key principals of the MV is that it will be of benefit to the 'community'. Although who/what the community actually is has not been specified within the programme framework, for the sake of the Institute's evaluation taken to include a number of key stakeholders: the young people themselves; the organisations they volunteered for; the recipients of the volunteering; and representatives from the community which the MV projects themselves were asked to define (geographic or interest).

The benefits which young people accrued were particularly impressive, ranging from the accumulation of skills, to increased self-confidence and an increased likelihood for future participation.

Participation in MV proved a huge boost for many young people, for example, in terms of personal development with 84% reporting increases in their confidence, 78% becoming happier at meeting and mixing with others, and 78% becoming more willing to try new things. Beyond learning about themselves and others, MVs also gained an array of skills through their volunteering - from hard-edged vocational skills to the softer more generic skills such as teamwork and leadership. It was apparent that MV had been instrumental in a considerable increase in human capital among many of the young people who had been involved, and this in turn led the MVs to comment on the contribution which their participation had made to their search for paid work or moves into higher education.

The evaluation also showed that young people's participation in MV was contributing to the development of social capital within communities in which they volunteered. The evaluation showed that through MV the young people had made new friends both similar and different to themselves, and that they had become more active and integrated members of their communities. For example, 57% of the MVs agreed that since volunteering they had felt more included in their community; 80% reported becoming more aware of the needs of others; and 39% had become more trusting of

people. Also through young people actively participating in MV, the programme had played a role in building links between different sections of the community; particularly in bridging inter-generational divides. Evidence does show that young people were gaining a wider appreciation of community through involvement. The findings of the national evaluation were reinforced by a separate study of one sports-based MV project which showed how young people rated learning leadership skills as the most important motivation for participation, but that after participation the fact that it was community based rose considerably in importance (Eley 2001). The article concluded that volunteering was important in encouraging pro-social behaviour among young people.

Further, there was considerable evidence within the MV evaluation to reinforce the evidence already coming from the United States that volunteering by young people of college-age had a positive effect on later participation (Sundeen and Raskoff 1994). 68% of MVs felt that through MV they had become more committed to volunteering; and a majority were planning to continue volunteering after they had completed their 200-hour commitment to MV. MV was not seen as an end in itself, rather as a vehicle through which young people could be encouraged to get involved in community in other ways. As one respondent said: 'If folks are volunteering as MVs I believe that they will go on to volunteer for the rest of their lives – it becomes part of their lifestyles'. Further, 48% of respondents stated that they had inspired other people to volunteer since becoming Millennium Volunteers. These findings are particularly poignant given that nearly half of all young people who have signed up as MVs had no previous experience of volunteering. As such the evaluation does suggest that participating in MV had contributed to the development of active citizenship; young people are 'learning to participate through participating'.

However, can these apparent developments within young people of the qualities of 'active citizens' through their participation in the Millennium Volunteers programme translate to a broader conception of citizenship? Does participating in MV lead to a greater understanding by young people of their responsibilities or rights of UK citizens? Do all young people have access to these (potentially/questionably) 'citizenship' enhancing possibilities? And indeed as advocates of volunteering should we even be trying to highlight such links to such an overt political agenda or should we be shouting louder about the benefits that we have already identified that volunteering brings?

The evaluation indicated that the benefits of participating in MV that the young people experienced were relative to their starting points and to their previous life experiences. Without a clear idea of how citizenship knowledge comes about through volunteering it must be recognised that some young people just 'would not get it'. The impacts that volunteers experienced were also likely to have been influenced by the type of activity that each young person was undertaking. For example, with young people being encouraged to build on what they are into, there has been a proliferation of activities such as DJ'ing which arguably involve less contact with members of the community and may lead to very different outcomes to some other volunteering activities. If we truly believe that volunteering is a personal choice then we must resist viewing befriending or environmental work as more worthy than DJ,ing, and yet trying to measure contribution to civic mindedness may require us to do just that.

In particular the difference between adult led and young person led activities are likely to have a considerable influence of the different benefits that young people receive from their volunteering activities within Millennium Volunteers. (The added value of young person led voluntary activities

over adult led activities has for the last few years been a key argument of organisations such as Changemakers (see for example, Gerlach 2001; Buckley, Garner and Turner, 2001)). Young person led volunteering involves MVs taking responsibility for their actions and those of their colleagues as together they work their projects through from conceptualisation to implementation and evaluation. Such young person led activities conceivably lead more directly to the development of skills such as leadership, decision-making, facilitation, team working, negotiation and compromise. This further muddies the waters – do we see a young person led DJ project as more contributory to civics than an adult led environmental project? The answer is probably that both will have something to offer as long as it is recognised that there is a need to have time to reflect on what volunteering experiences mean (Hoodless 2002). It is only through reflecting upon their experiences as volunteers that young people can realise their learning and establish links to from their volunteering to broader issues such as the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. MV could have been an opportunity to pursue this, but research shows that this happened infrequently (Davis Smith, Ellis and Howlett 2002).

Further, although MV encourages youth ownership in all its projects, the evaluation showed a general misunderstanding by organisations as to what exactly this means. While there were some very good examples of young person led projects, in a number of cases young peoples' leadership was often limited to giving young people a choice in the voluntary activities that they undertook thus limiting the potential benefits of a true young person led programme. As such it would appear that to date within MV the young person led element is an opportunity missed.

While there was evidence that a number of MV projects were successfully encouraging young people to reflect upon their experiences with time created within the programme to facilitate and support such a process, for the majority of projects this level of reflection was far more limited. Indeed, it could be argued that the programme's preoccupation with the number of hours being volunteered and with target chasing serves to undermine the potential of MV to create a space for young person's reflection and so achieve such an end.

Similarly, while evidence emerging from pilots scheme being run for the delivery of active participation element of the new citizenship curriculum in schools suggests that active participation does led to growing understanding of citizenship (see for example, Hannam, 2001); the evidence does not however say if this is due to the volunteering activity per se or if it is only through the link being made between such active participation and the more formal parts of the citizenship curriculum in which young people are given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in a broader context. This underlines the point made above with references to Straw's remarks: neither theory nor practice alone can lead to the development of citizenship; there is a need for practice to be linked to theory if the connections are to be made.

As to whether or not MV has been inclusive and opened up volunteering to previously excluded groups (as the official framework of the programme claim it aims to be), or if it has provided a more systematic approach to civic education (as could be read as a more implicit aim); then the evidence is inconclusive. It has been the argument of many commentators that the concepts of active citizenship as espoused by Conservative and Labour governments were fundamentally exclusive as they failed to recognise the different ways in which people participated (valuing formal participation over informal activities) and the reality in which different groups had differentiated abilities to participation (see for example, Dean, 1999; Lister, 1995). How far had MV gone in addressing this issue?

The programme has had considerable successes in terms of attracting diverse young people to volunteering. For example, a tenth of MVs were from black and minority ethnic groups; 7% were disabled; and 19% were unemployed. Further, with 47% of MVs having no previous experience of volunteering, the programme has clearly been successful in opening up volunteering to a new group of young people.

However, with 65% of MVs being women it would appear that young men are under-represented as MVs; and with 64% of MVs being in education, compared to just 12% being in employment the programme is also over-representative of young people in education. Further, a number of respondents within the evaluation were keen to point out that through failing to challenge mainstream conceptualisations of volunteering, the programme statistics (or those that record them) are unlikely to recognise extent young people were previously volunteering as indeed the young people themselves did not recognise their activities as such.

It was the conclusion of the evaluation that while the programme had gone a considerable way towards broadening participation in volunteering and had had significant successes in meeting its aim of inclusivity, it was being hindered by certain programme requirements. For example, the requirement for MVs to commit to 200 hours of volunteering tended to act as a disincentive/barrier to participation by disadvantaged young people and failed to recognise that sustained personal commitment means different things to different people. Further, the pressure felt by some project to meet their targets for the number of young people becoming involved in MV and achieving their Awards of Excellence had meant that they had tended to concentrate on involving easy-to-reach groups such as college students.

As such, while going a considerable way towards creating a more inclusive form of active citizenship - making the point that a structured programme of support will encourage those not traditionally seen to volunteer - those from under-privileged socio-economic backgrounds or with extra support needs - MV has only been partially successful in overcoming the barriers these groups face.

4. Conclusions

This paper started from a notion that if government wants to further citizenship through volunteering it needs a better notion of what citizenship (and indeed, volunteering) means. The paper also argues that theory and practice must go together. It must be recognised that the MV programme as it stands is not explicit in stating that citizenship is an aim of the programme. However, a review of government attitudes towards volunteering, and the speeches of politicians makes it difficult to see that government is not expecting some form of citizenship pay-back for the money it is investing in young people volunteering.

It is interesting to note that the same government department in England administers both MV and is co-ordinating the new curriculum for citizenship in education which is experimenting with community involvement as a way of bringing the subject alive. And yet while MV has lost its references to

citizenship, citizenship in education is missing references to volunteering, while they are both dealing with the same broad area.

We want to stress the impact that MV is having and underline the variety of activities that young people are doing and the experience they are gaining (See Davis Smith, Ellis, and Howlett 2002). Our purpose in drawing attention to citizenship aspects is to be pro-active – in an environment of ‘what works’ we do not want government to assume that volunteering equals citizenship (or indeed is less than active citizenship). The danger is that when policy makers find that the picture is more complicated they may decide volunteering doesn’t work. Our job therefore is to accumulate the evidence of what government can expect from voluntary action taking into account the heterogeneity of volunteers and their tasks. If this is to include aspects of citizenship, then the first step must be to clearly define the relationship between volunteering and citizenship.

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Steven Howlett
Institute for Volunteering Research
Regent's Wharf,
8 All Saints Street
London
N1 9RL
United Kingdom
T: +44 (0)20 7520 8903
F: +44 (0)20 7520 8910
E-mail: steven.howlett@thecentre.org.uk
www.ivr.org.uk

Angela Ellis
Institute for Volunteering Research
Regent's Wharf,
8 All Saints Street
London

N1 9RL
United Kingdom
T: +44 (0)20 7520 8907
F: +44 (0)20 7520 8910
E-mail: angela.ellis@thecentre.org.uk
www.ivr.org.uk