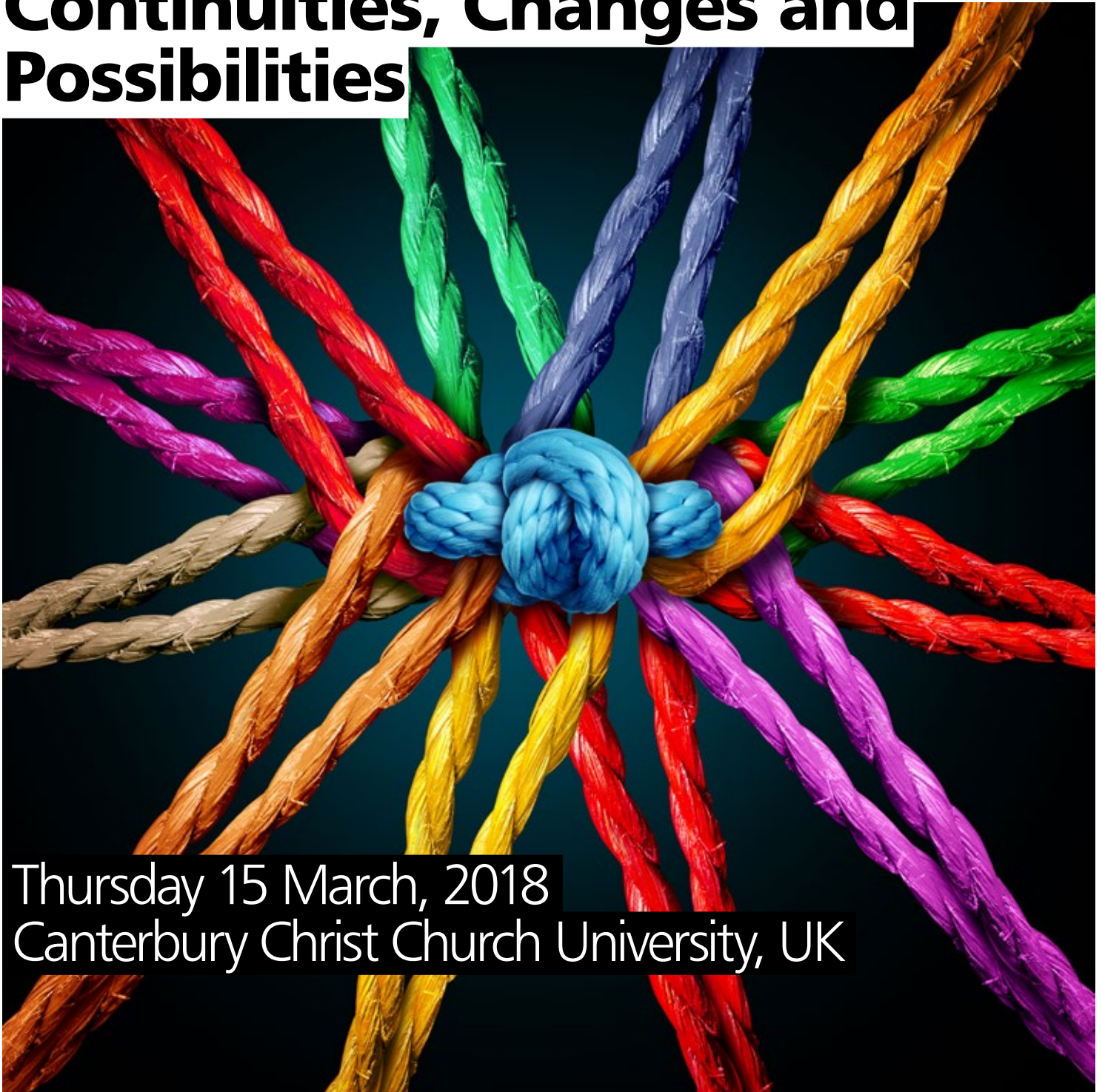


CONFERENCE

# Youth Action, Activism and Education: Continuities, Changes and Possibilities



Thursday 15 March, 2018  
Canterbury Christ Church University, UK

LEVERHULME  
TRUST

**VSSN**  
Voluntary Sector Studies Network

 Canterbury  
Christ Church  
University



# PROGRAMME

9:00-9:30	REGISTRATION AND COFFEE
9:30-9:45	WELCOME
	PRESENTATION 1
9:45-10:15	<b><i>Changing patterns of youth activism and education across six nations</i></b> Ian Davies, University of York; Mark Evans, OISE, University of Toronto; Marta Fulop, Hungarian Academy of Sciences; Dina Kiwan, American University of Beirut; Andrew Peterson, CCCU; and, Jasmine Sim, NIE, Singapore.
	PRESENTATION 2
10:15-11:00	<b><i>Rethinking Youth Citizenship in Times of Austerity</i></b> Rosalyn Black, Deakin University, Australia and Lucas Walsh, Monash University, Australia
11:00-11:20	COFFEE / TEA
	PRESENTATION 3
11:25-12:10	<b><i>Struggle for active citizenship: New perspectives on youth styles and spaces of participation</i></b> Barry Percy-Smith, University of Huddersfield and Nigel Thomas, University of Central Lancashire
	PARALLEL PAPERS 1
	SESSION A
12:15-13:15	<b><i>What mattered ten years on? Young people's reflections on their involvement with a charitable youth participation project</i></b> Alison Body, Canterbury Christ Church University, and Eddy Hogg, Centre for Philanthropy, University of Kent and; <b><i>Youth Activism in practice – kicking the dust at Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales</i></b> Sarah Younan, Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales
	SESSION B
	<b><i>Working-class girls and youth social action: 'hope labour'?</i></b> Emma Taylor-Collins, University of Birmingham and; <b><i>Making the case for the study of young women's leadership in civil society organisations</i></b> Erica Lewis, Edge Hill University
13:15-14:00	LUNCH
	PARALLEL PAPERS 2
	SESSION A
14:00-15:00	<b><i>Sharing isn't caring: Clicktivism and the performance of youth action</i></b> Jon Dean, Sheffield Hallam University and Rachel Wood, University of Chester and; <b><i>Youth Action during the Ebola Response in Sierra Leone: Young Volunteers as Agents or Victims</i></b> Alice Chadwick, University of Bath
	SESSION B
	<b><i>Civic Activism and Higher Education</i></b> Bernadette Curran, University of Northampton and Victoria Boulton, University of Northampton and; <b><i>Youth action and participation: A consideration of indifference</i></b> Ralph Leighton, Canterbury Christ Church University
	PRESENTATION 4
15:05-15:50	<b><i>Co-construction of social action in Higher Education – Drawing together student, children and voluntary sector voices</i></b> Alison Body, Canterbury Christ Church University and Emily Lau, Canterbury Christ Church University
15:50-16:00	PLENARY

# ABSTRACTS

## PRESENTATION 1

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### Changing patterns of youth activism/action and education across six nations

Ian Davies, University of York; Mark Evans, OISE, University of Toronto; Marta Fulop, Hungarian Academy of Sciences; Dina Kiwan, American University of Beirut; Andrew Peterson, Canterbury Christ Church University; and, Jasmine Sim, NIE, Singapore.

In this presentation we draw on the work of a Leverhulme funded international network to explore changing patterns of youth activism/action and education across six nations. – Australia, Canada, England, Hungary, Lebanon and Singapore. In particular, we explore the meanings of youth activism/action and engagement to young people and to professionals/policy makers within and across these different socio-political contexts.

In focusing specifically on changing patterns, we are interested in whether, how and why – young people's engagement within their political communities has changed or is changing. Drawing on extensive reviews of existing research in each of the six nations, as well as our network events and meetings, we suggest that young peoples' action is interpreted predominantly in terms of a dualism between (1) formal and formalised action within mainstream political processes and (2) alternative, more individualised actions which relate to specific issues of importance to the young people themselves. This dualism often frames not only literature on the actual action of young people, but also analyses of how youth action is framed and promoted within policy discourses and professional practices. We contend that while analytically useful in some ways, the dualism perhaps masks important elements and experiences of the [changing] patterns of youth activism/action. That is, we suggest that those interested in young peoples' civic activism/action should avoid reifying the dualism between formal, "traditional" and non-formal, "alternative" forms of participation for the reason that doing so may obscure some important relations between formal, "traditional" and non-formal, "alternative" forms of participation which need to be further explored within and through research.

## PRESENTATION 2

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### Rethinking Youth Citizenship in Times of Austerity

Rosalyn Black, Deakin University, Australia and Lucas Walsh, Monash University, Australia

Two key threads run through the turbulence and upheaval associated with recent events including the implementation of austerity policies, the rise of the alt-right, Trump's election and Brexit: geography and affect. Understanding these two threads and their impact on young people – especially young people in communities affected by austerity - requires a nuanced understanding of youth citizenship.

Despite widespread and entrenched views suggesting otherwise, young people are concerned about the nature of democracy, their role as citizens in times of austerity, and the effects and impacts of those times on them and their communities, including their sense of belonging as citizens. Rather than being moderated through traditional or centralised political institutions or affiliations, however, their citizenship concerns and commitments are increasingly enacted in informal and localised ways. Much of their participation as citizens operates outside formal educational structures such as schools or universities. This means that it is 'off the radar' of education systems and invisible to policymakers.

This presentation starts by examining some of the recent literature exploring the geographic and affective dimensions of young people's citizenship. It then draws on recent field research conducted by the authors with educators and young people to mount an argument for research that brings attention back to the local: that is, research that documents young people's feelings of belonging (or otherwise) and their efforts to contribute as citizens in communities affected by austerity.

## PRESENTATION 3

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### Struggle for active citizenship: New perspectives on youth styles and spaces of participation

Barry Percy-Smith, University of Huddersfield and Nigel Thomas, University of Central Lancashire

Across Europe there is concern about the extent to which young people 'participate' in society. Prevailing discourses of youth participation have tended to place emphasis on young people's participation in formal decision making processes, generally understood as political participation. There is, however, a developing critique that these 'mainstream' discourses of youth participation are driven by adult concerns that emphasise the pedagogisation of youth participation as a means to promote 'active citizenship'. There is evidence that, whilst many young people do want to participate, mainstream structures for participation are not always attractive to young people with the result that many young people are turning to self-initiated activities to seek meaningful alternative opportunities for participation. At the same time there is a broadening of the concept of 'participation' beyond conventional decision-making contexts, to recognise the significance of wider notions of social and civic participation. The PARTISPACE project starts from the assumption that young people are already participating as active citizens in the context of their everyday lives, although this is not always recognised in mainstream contexts. The study hence set out to explore young people's own styles and spaces of participation within eight cities across Europe. The project involved in-depth ethnographic research and action research with young people to explore existing and alternative forms of participation. PARTISPACE involves partners from: Bulgaria, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the UK.

In this presentation we will draw particularly on the action research elements of the study which involved young people undertaking their own projects to explore and make sense of their own forms of participation in the context of their everyday lives and concerns. Using case studies, we will discuss key findings emerging from these youth led projects that highlight differing dynamics and orientations of youth participation, such as the role of the adult (youth) worker, the significance of participation as a learning process, the role of social capital, the importance of (national) cultural context and the extent to which youth participation is inextricably linked to young people's own biographies. In doing so we will contribute some emerging thoughts about new theoretical perspectives on youth participation.

## PRESENTATION 4

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### Co-construction of social action in Higher Education – Drawing together student, children and voluntary sector voices

Alison Body, Canterbury Christ Church University and Emily Lau, Canterbury Christ Church University

Citizenship remains one of the most contested terms across social and political sciences. Youth citizenship has been commonly concerned with participation, particularly in terms of political, volunteering and involvement in formal decision-making processes. We argue that the large-scale push of youth action schemes such as the National Citizen Service and the iWill campaign construct youth participation in a particular context, designed to create a certain 'type' of citizen which aligns with the dominant neoliberal ideology. We further suggest that youth voice is largely absent from this often pre-constructed and adult-led process.

Particularly focusing on the notion of voice, this paper draws attention to University students' conceptualisation of themselves as social actors who can actively shape and contribute to the communities they live within. We report on a project which worked with 160 third year early-years education undergraduate students to investigate, explore and promote their views about social issues and concerns raised by one of five local charities working with and/or on behalf of young children. These students then worked with over 400 younger children (aged 2-10 years old) in co-constructed social action research projects to co-research these issues.

Prior to project instigation, baseline survey data revealed that the majority of students positioned social action with the 'other', rather than identifying themselves as active citizens able to influence the world around them. Further data collection – including ongoing feedback, end of project surveys and focus groups – revealed that the process of actively engaging within a co-constructed social action research project not only enabled students to be able to reconceptualise themselves, but also to reconsider the role of younger children as social and political actors. Students championing for young children's rights, as enshrined in Article 12, helped them critically reflect on their own individual positioning and voice.

The paper deliberates how exposure to alternative experiences of social action focused on championing of young children's voices, can enhance students' learning, engagement and consideration of social issues. The findings in this paper suggest that perception of voice and self as a social actor is impacted by several subtleties, including social capital, education, engagement, and individuals past experiences. The project based approach helped students to simultaneously redefine themselves and young children as active and capable social and political actors, and offers some insight into theoretical perspectives on developing social action within higher education.

# PARALLEL PAPERS 1

## SESSION A

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### What mattered ten years on? Young people's reflections on their involvement with a charitable youth participation project

Alison Body, Canterbury Christ Church University, and  
Eddy Hogg, University of Kent

Youth work in England is undergoing rapid and significant change. In the backdrop of austerity, welfare reform and altered commissioning arrangements, voluntary sector organisations involved in these services are having to realign services and reconsider their work with young people. Ultimately the national youth offer and youth work has changed radically, fuelling a debate about the very function and impact of youth work.

This paper makes an important contribution to this debate by presenting original research on what young people themselves prioritise as important, with a particular focus on youth participation work, and highlights the longer term impacts voluntary sector organisations can have on the lives of more vulnerable young people. Working with a charity who have been delivering youth participation projects since 2003 to vulnerable children and young people, we carried in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 former beneficiaries who had been involved in one or more of these projects between 2003-2008 and explored their experiences and perceptions of the impact this work had on their life journey ten years on.

The findings suggest that beneficiaries felt the support they received was, in most cases, 'transformative' in their lives. However, they defined their experiences and the impact of a project through their relationship with individual staff and volunteers supporting them, and less so with defined services, projects or the wider organisation. Furthermore, the findings suggested the young people engaged in these programmes were very likely to go on to volunteer, have a strong desire to 'give back', are likely to engage in community participation and advocacy, and have an increased sense of social responsibility and supporting others. This paper highlights both learning for voluntary sector organisations working with children and young people, and academics and policy makers researching participation and youth work.

### Youth Activism in practice – kicking the dust at Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales

Sarah Younan, Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum  
Wales

Museums are rarely as neutral as their rhetoric suggests – the management, governance and everyday running of museums is impacted by socio-economic factors, as are the practices of collecting, displaying and interpreting collections.

Overwhelmingly, decision-making powers in museums still lie in the hands of a white, educated, middle-aged workforce. Over 90% of management level jobs across the UK are held by this demographic. Despite this, the myth of museum neutrality frequently remains unchallenged in museum practice and museums remain cautious about their engagement with contemporary issues; wary to be perceived as biased, or to be lending support to particular moral or political standpoints. However, a growing number of museums, galleries and heritage organisations are recognising the need to engage with, explore, and act upon social inequality, political injustice and the causes of environmental destruction. For groups that are underrepresented in the political process, or largely excluded from society, museums can provide important recognition of their identities. Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales is pushing embracing activism and social engagement, through experimenting with new and inclusive approaches, such as the co-curation of exhibitions with people who have experienced homelessness, and through the opening up of museum governance structures to young people.

This paper investigates, how young people are taking up opportunities to become involved in institutional change at Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, and to repurpose the public space of the museum as a venue for activism, intervention and to have their voices heard.



### Working-class girls and youth social action: 'hope labour'?

Emma Taylor-Collins, University of Birmingham

This paper draws on findings from an intersectional, ethnographic study with 15 sixth-form girls living in some of the poorest boroughs of London. Research indicates that regular participation in social action among 10-20 year olds is substantial at 42%, yet there are socioeconomic and gender differences in participation, with girls from low-income backgrounds participating less than more affluent girls (Cabinet Office and Ipsos MORI, 2016). The reasons for these differences are not well understood; I aim to make an original contribution to this field by understanding the social action experiences of girls from low-income backgrounds.

Informed by Hill Collins (2000) work on domains of power – cultural, structural, interpersonal, and disciplinary – I explore how various influences might affect these girls' participation in social action. Methods include interviews with the girls, and with their teachers, parents and others who influence their involvement in social action, and observations in and out of school.

In this paper I will discuss one of the emerging themes from my data – youth social action as 'hope labour'; that is, 'un- or under-compensated work carried out in the present, often for experience or exposure, in the hope that future employment opportunities may follow' (Kuehn and Corrigan, 2013). I suggest, building on Clare Holdsworth's work on the 'cult of experience' (Holdsworth, 2017, p. 298), that the dominant discourse around social action frames it as a form of hope labour, and discuss how the girls' views and experiences of social action interact with this.

#### References

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- Kuehn, K. and Corrigan, T. F. (2013) 'Hope Labor: The Role of Employment Prospects in Online Social Production', *The Political Economy of Communication*, 1 (1), pp. 9-25.

### Making the case for the study of young women's leadership in civil society organisations

Erica Lewis, Edge Hill University

Within the field of leadership studies, the implicit assumption is that our leaders are old, or at least older people. Carole A. MacNeil drew attention to this gap within leadership studies through her analysis of Stogdill's *Handbook of Leadership* noting that although the book reviews "five thousand leadership studies, there is nothing about youth as leaders or about leadership development for youth" (2006, citing Bass 1981). MacNeil's reference to Stogdill's handbook dates back to the original publication, however, a brief review of the 4th edition suggests little has changed, while there was one brief and positive mention of old/er leaders within the discussions of minority leaders, no discussion of young/er leaders was readily identifiable (Bass, 2008). But the idea that the under-representation of young people in leadership roles in organisations and civil society is a problem is one that is starting to gain momentum (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2014, United Nations Development Programme, 2013).

The arguments as to why it is important that women's voices are heard in civil society are well rehearsed (Childs and Lovenduski, 2013), and similar arguments could be made for young women, but rarely have been. In this paper I want to highlight why in order to strengthen campaigns such as girls education and child marriage we need to ensure that not only the voices of young women and girls are heard, but that their leadership within our movements and movement organisations is recognised and respected.

#### References

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- UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2013. Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle. New York: United Nations Development Programme.

# PARALLEL PAPERS 2

## SESSION A

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### Sharing isn't caring: Clicktivism and the performance of youth action

Jon Dean, Sheffield Hallam University and Rachel Wood, University of Chester

This presentation will draw on original qualitative data exploring young people's views on social media practices such as calls to 'RT to spread awareness' and 'Share to show you care'. Defined in varying ways, but by Kristofferson, White and Pelozo (2014: 1149) as 'a willingness to perform a relatively costless, token display of support for a social cause, with an accompanying lack of willingness to devote significant effort to enact meaningful change', these forms of participation are a growing part of online discourse. Over eight focus groups with 37 young people aged 18-25, we explored how charity appeals of this form are perceived and experienced on social media. Participants felt that these appeals and practices play into the presentation of self on social media, enabling them to benefit from the symbolic power of 'doing something good' for a charitable cause without having to commit. Recognising that they themselves buy into such a form of activism, but aware of the limitations and potential negative consequences of such activities, participants were often left cynical and disengaged by the constant presence of such appeals on their social media timelines. Building on what we already know about 'clicktivism' and 'slacktivism', and wider discussions about social media and charity, this presentation will reflect on the role social media can play in youth activism, and what works in terms of encouraging young people to spread charitable messages.

### Youth Action during the Ebola Response in Sierra Leone: Young Volunteers as Agents or Victims

Alice Chadwick, University of Bath

Volunteering amongst young people is generally considered to be an important means of youth activism and citizenship formation. In this presentation I look at the Ebola response in Sierra Leone and explore how youth volunteering is understood by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Crises such as the Ebola outbreak provide an opportunity for the re-evaluation of norms of youth action. However, I argue that this process is strongly shaped by prevailing views regarding what constitutes appropriate forms of youthful participation within society. On the one hand, youth volunteering during the Ebola crisis is understood as an expression of activism and participation. This is important in a society where the young are the demographic majority but are also marginalised. However, tensions over definitions of volunteering during Ebola also led to concerns around stigma and exploitation, with the perceived success of youth action underplaying and obscuring the difficulties faced by volunteers including non-payment and trauma (Kingori and McGowan 2016). These contrasting views reflect broader perceptions of young people in Sierra Leone as either 'autonomous liberal actors' or a group dependent on and controlled by others (Durham 2000: 113). Through primary empirical analysis, I argue that these divergent understandings of youth action during the Ebola crisis provide contested evidence for change as they remain embedded within normative classifications of youth as either agents or victims. Studying how youth voluntary action is understood in times of crisis allows us to reflect on how young people negotiate for the recognition and legitimacy of their actions within society.

#### References

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## SESSION B

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### Civic Activism and Higher Education

Bernadette Curran, University of Northampton and  
Victoria Boulton, University of Northampton

This paper will focus on the civic engagement of young people's involvement in applied social studies courses in a higher education setting. It will assess how this inclusivity shapes better educational outcomes for learners, gives a voice to marginalised and unheard experiences and enables students to work with young people in a range of settings.

The processes and transformative change which took place within one University team, the development of working relationship between educators and young people from communities which are often under represented due to age and social economic position are explored in the paper. Demonstrating how engaging this group of young people in the delivery of higher education courses has the potential to lead to better pedagogic connectedness to young people's perspectives and enable this lived experience to become embedded in the delivery of teaching for future and current practitioners is evidenced.

The paper will explore how these young people were recruited and supported to develop the confidence to speak out about their lived experiences, It will also highlight the importance of working with an emerging grass roots youth project which was economically remunerated in return for helping the University to engage with young people. These University resources provided the means for sustainability which in turn ensured ongoing social and emotional support at a community level for young people and their families. The paper will consider how capturing the experiences of young people and developing narrative based educational content enhanced student learning and understanding, helping them to interpret contemporary social issues at a national and local level.

### Civic activism: A consideration of indifference

Ralph Leighton, Canterbury Christ Church University

The perception that the young are politically apathetic depends upon the criteria employed for identification and measurement of interest and participation. The assumption of disinterest is unsupported by evidence (see Kimberlee, 2002; Henn et al 2005; Bernstein 2010; Ross and Dooly 2010; Leighton 2012). The Crick Report (1998) asserted that the young have opted out of party politics; this is not synonymous with opting out of political behaviour, and the report was published 20 years ago – life has moved on. However, it does not follow that all young people are socially aware and active. Therefore this paper looks not at political involvement but at indifference, adopting Gramsci's (1917) position "that living means taking sides. Those who really live cannot help being a citizen and a partisan."

It is proposed that academics must promote civic activism. We should not pretend to neutrality on this, but encourage students to take a stand, to care about something, and to show they care. While the 'safe space/destroy-that- statue-because-I don't-like-it' movement might be open to question, at least those young people are expressing opinions and trying to achieve change. In the words of Gonzalez, "[a]rgument, debate, doubt are the stuff of human liberation; they are also the only known antidote to indifference. (Gonzalez 2003, P493) In turn, attention is given to the notion of human capabilities – Sen (2005), Nussbaum (2007). It is not enough that people have the right to activism, they must also have opportunities and the skills to access that right.

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