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Christine Han ^a, Bryony Hoskins ^b & Jasmine Boon-Yee Sim ^c

^a Institute of Education, University of London, London, UK

^b Southampton Education School, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK

^c National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

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The relationship between civic attitudes and voting intention: an analysis of vocational upper secondary schools in England and Singapore

Christine Han^{a*}, Bryony Hoskins^b and Jasmine Boon-Yee Sim^c

^aInstitute of Education, University of London, London, UK; ^bSouthampton Education School, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK; ^cNational Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

From 2009 to 2011, a team from the Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies carried out a mixed-methods study of young people in England and Singapore. With regard to civic attitudes, the study showed that there was a greater sense of political self-efficacy and collective (school) efficacy in Singapore than in England. In addition, the group in Singapore scored higher on future voting relative to the group in England. Further, while both political self-efficacy and collective (school) efficacy were correlated with future voting in England, only the latter was correlated in the case of Singapore. For some, the results may seem counter-intuitive. The article reflects on these results, particularly those relating to democratic outcomes.

Keywords: civic attitude; democracy; efficacy; England; inequality; Singapore; Vocational Education and Training (VET); voting

Introduction

Civic attitudes, such as those relating to efficacy and political participation, are important for democracy and many scholars assume such that such attitudes take shape early in life, which would point to the importance of education for these. At the same time, political socialisation may differ across countries, and conventional wisdom is that established democracies are more successful in fostering civic attitudes than, for instance, young democracies or authoritarian states. From 2009 to 2011, the authors were part of a team at the Economic and Social Research Council-funded Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies carrying out a mixed-methods study of young people in Denmark, England, France, Germany and Singapore. At the time, the finding from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) was that the average

*Corresponding author. Email: Christine.Han@ioe.ac.uk

percentages of 14-year-olds who expected to carry out activities associated with and including voting, ranged from 76% to 82% (Schulz et al. 2010, 143). If we can use the ICCS study as a reference point, our study found that vocational 16+ students in England and Singapore scored lower with respect to future voting intentions than the ICCS average.

On the face of it, England and Singapore have similar democratic and educational structures. However, the former has a longer tradition of democracy, while the latter has, following independence, developed a form of government that has been described as soft authoritarianism. If education systems reflect and promote the values of the existing political system, this would predict higher mean scores for political self-efficacy and collective (school) efficacy for England compared to Singapore. However, the findings turned out to be counter-intuitive. Both of these scores – as well as that for future voting – were lower in England than in Singapore. The question was why the Singapore respondents – most of whom had come from the least prestigious, vocational track¹ – would score higher on future voting compared to the group in England. There was also the intriguing finding that, while both political self-efficacy and collective (school) efficacy were correlated with future voting in England, only the latter was correlated in the case of Singapore.

In this article, we look at the relationship between civic attitudes, such as those relating to political self-efficacy and collective (school) efficacy, and future voting among students from two vocational upper-secondary schools in England and Singapore. We will examine the theoretical explanations and contextual factors so as to cast light on the above findings. The article begins with an overview of the relevant key concepts and theories, the methodology and methods and the quantitative findings. Then, drawing on the interview data, we will elaborate on students' perceptions and experiences of inequalities, two forms of efficacy (political self-efficacy and collective [school] efficacy) and the effect of these on future voting. Our hypothesis is that contextual factors relate in some way to both forms of efficacy and, though these, to future voting intentions.

Key concepts and theories

This section will examine the theories relating to efficacy and political participation, and the effect of one on the other. It will also review existing research on how vocational education affects participation.

To begin with, there is a context in which young people think about civic and political participation. While some policy makers may see participation as a good in itself, people in the real world need to see a reason *for* participation in order *to* participate. Haste (2004) refers, for example, to the 'pre-conditions for engagement and the antecedents of participation':

Effective participation requires identification with the project.... It requires a sense of one's agency and efficacy – that action is possible and potentially effective and that the individual can personally take such action, alone or with others. (430)

Writing in the context of social movements, Meyer (2007) similarly believes that:

For most people, participation ... is dependent upon coming to a belief that a problem is (a) urgent, (b) has potential solutions, and (c) that his or her efforts might matter. (453)

Hence, individuals need to see that problems exist and that these problems require *their* action. This, in turn, calls on a sense of self-efficacy, which comprises 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations' (Bandura 1995, 2). For Bandura (2006), self-efficacy should be studied in the context of the specific domain to which it is applied. In this article, we look at students' self-efficacy in the political domain.

In addition to self-efficacy, Bandura (1995) also writes about *collective* efficacy. This refers to 'people's belief in their joint capabilities' to make an issue a group priority, 'to forge divergent self-interests into a shared agenda, to enlist supporters and resources for collective action, to devise effective strategies and to execute them successfully, and to withstand forcible opposition and discouraging setbacks' (Bandura 1995, 33). For Bandura, the difference between personal and collective efficacy is in the unit of agency. Since many of the experiences of young people are school-based, we will look at their sense of collective efficacy as experienced in the school context.

When it comes to developing the appropriate values and skills for collective action, some researchers see the school as having an important role to play (Power and Power 1992; Veugelers 2007; Veugelers and Vedder 2003). These researchers consider the school to be a community, and a means by which young people can be inducted into the larger society. Citing the work of Power and Power, Veugelers and Vedder (2003) describe how schools with democratic practices that encourage justice and community spirit 'stimulate moral growth by participation, open discussion of moral issues, contact with differing perspectives and ideas, and living in a moral community' (p. 383). Where the countries in the present article are concerned, there is a longer tradition of school participation in England that includes – but is not limited to – the use of school councils (Citizenship Foundation 2001; Davies, Flanagan, and Hogarth 2004; Davies and Yamashita 2007). If this is the case, we should find that young people from education systems that promote a strong sense of collective (school) efficacy would be able to

transfer this to the wider social and political sphere as adults, or see the possibility of their doing so.

One of the themes in this article is the effect of the experience of being placed in the vocational track on political participation. There has been very limited research on this, as much of the literature has focused on the effect of citizenship education on different forms of participation, membership of organisations, trust, democratic attitudes and political participation (van de Werfhorst 2007). However, the consensus in the available literature is that, where educational provision separates vocational students from those in general education, this enhances different sets of social and cultural values (CEDEFOP 2011, forthcoming; Janmaat and Mons 2011; Stevens 2002; van de Werfhorst 2007).

Having said that, opinion is divided as to the way in which the experience of Vocational Education and Training (VET) influences values and behaviour. Using the data from the OECD International Adult Literacy Survey,² van de Werfhorst (2007) found that young people who attend vocational upper-secondary schools participate less in voluntary organisations than those who go to general upper-secondary schools (27). He also found that the more stratified the education system is, the larger the difference between vocational and general upper-secondary graduates in terms of participation in voluntary organisations (28).

In his study of 13,598 16–18-year-old students in Belgium, Stevens (2002) similarly found that there was a social and cultural divide between vocational and general education students. The former were less likely to participate in social organisations (e.g. voluntary organisations, political parties and human rights neighbourhood associations).

While Stevens and van de Werfhorst concur that VET had a negative effect on participation, they differ as to how this occurs. Van de Werfhorst (2007) argues that an education system using distinct tracks ‘emphasises social distance by promoting intra-class similarity and interclass difference’, with the result that VET and general track students belong to ‘different networks with different habits and norms regarding social participation’ (12). Stevens (2002) highlights the fact that there may be a psychological element at work. Young people who end up in the vocational system have a sense of academic failure and attribute this to personal failure: they have come to believe the notion of meritocracy they had been taught in school. Following Ten Dam and Volman (2003), Janmaat (forthcoming) suggests a third possible explanation: academic tracks offer ‘a different and more advanced version of citizenship education than the (pre)vocational tracks’.

Whatever the case may be, Stevens’ account bears similarities to the Just World theory, in which individuals attempt to justify an unjust situation by attributing praise and blame in such a way as to make these appear deserved (Adams 1965; Rubin and Peplau 1973). For Just World theorists, this action serves a psychological function of making inequalities or injustice bearable.

Belief in a just world would mean that people are less likely to participate – if they perceive situations to be fair and just, then there is no reason to take action to change things for the better.

In contrast to van de Werfhorst and Stevens, research carried out by CEDEFOP (2011, forthcoming) suggests an alternative hypothesis. Using the European Community Household Panel data,³ CEDEFOP researchers found that the orientation of vocational studies towards the labour market helped to construct stronger professional identities, which enhanced greater civic participation (CEDEFOP forthcoming). This research builds on Heinz (1999), who argues that there are instances of VET that encourage ‘vocational socialisation’, in which training involves not only learning about work, but also building a work-related identity and social links that ‘connects the individual with society’ (15). However, the CEDEFOP researchers argue that the forming of professional identity is more likely to occur where VET qualifications enjoy a higher level of recognition by employers and society in general. If this is the case, then we would expect in our findings to see that experiencing vocational education enhances democratic engagement.

Another factor we take into consideration is how young people come to be in vocational education. In some countries young people opt for it, while in others they are selected on the basis of ability or aptitude. There is the further question as to the context in which selection takes place, for example whether VET is institutionalised, whether there is status or stigma attached to it and whether it offers good job opportunities. This article will look at the pathways available to, and taken by, young people in England and Singapore, and the context of VET provision, in order to understand how vocational tracking is linked to future voting.

A final factor that will be considered is the way in which socialisation into civic attitudes may differ across countries. Among other things, there is a longer tradition of democracy in England relative to Singapore, and it is generally assumed that education systems reflect and promote the values of the existing political system.

Methods

From 2009 to 2011, data was collected on young people in vocational upper-secondary schools in England and Singapore. Where England only has one vocational upper secondary track (Further Education [FE]), there are two in Singapore (Polytechnic and Institute of Technical Education [ITE] – the ITE is the lower of the two tracks). For our study, a number of vocational upper-secondary schools in the two countries were identified as being ‘typical’ with respect to course provision and student intake. They were approached, and one school in each country agreed to participate in the study. Approximately 100 questionnaires were completed for each school. Included in the

questionnaire were items on political self-efficacy and collective (school) efficacy, as well as future civic and political participation. We also conducted interviews with 7 students and 2 teachers at the FE college in England and 12 students and 2 teachers at the Technical College⁴ in Singapore. The interviewees used a question schedule that, like the questionnaire, focused on forms of efficacy and civic and political participation. The interviews were transcribed and coded according to broad categories derived from the literature, which included forms of efficacy and participation. The interviews were then read in context and additional codes developed.

In the next section, we look at the background to the political and education systems in England and Singapore.

England and Singapore: political and education systems

Both Singapore and the UK are parliamentary democracies with universal suffrage. A multi-party political system operates in the UK and the government comprises the House of Commons and the House of Lords, with the former being made up of elected Members of Parliament (MPs). At its independence in 1965, Singapore began with a form of democracy based on that of the UK – including the parliamentary system – and a similar education system. This similarity in the political and education systems provides grounds for comparative analysis. Over the years, however, modifications have been made to Singapore's democratic and education systems that can be considered innovative by any standard.

Politically, Singapore technically has a multi-party system, but has operated largely as a single party state, with the People's Action Party (PAP) having been in continuous power since 1959. A radical innovation to the electoral system has been the introduction of the Group Representation Constituency (GRC) in which MPs from up to six constituencies run on a single ticket, with the requirement that one of these should be a member of an ethnic minority group (Elections Department Singapore 2012a). The stated reason was to ensure the representation of ethnic minority groups in parliament. However, critics have noted that opposition parties can find it difficult to meet this requirement and to contest these seats.

Where education is concerned, the system in England is mixed, with a choice of fee-paying private schools and state grammar and comprehensive schools. The system is becoming increasingly diverse, with new types of schools being introduced, such as academies, city technology colleges and free schools. Despite this, the vast majority of secondary schools are comprehensive (80–90%). Grammar schools select their students and, although comprehensives do not officially do so, entry to these schools is often made on the basis of the geographical location of the student's home address, which can be a form of selection by proxy. Setting by ability is often practised, even in comprehensive schools. At the end of lower-secondary school,

young people are selected into sixth form or FE college on the basis of their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grades.

Singapore operates an education structure similar to that of the UK: six years of primary, four to five years of lower-secondary and two to three years of upper-secondary schooling. However, the system is much more selective and competitive than that in the UK. Subject-based banding begins at 10+ (MOE 2011). Children are selected into lower-secondary school, with the ‘better’ schools creaming off those who are academically more able. Students are then placed in one of three main tracks. The most able students take the four-year Express track, which is more demanding than the five-year Normal Academic (NA) track. These two tracks prepare students for further education at a junior college⁵ or polytechnic. Students who do least well are assigned to a four-year vocational Normal Technical (NT) track, at the end of which they continue their vocational training at an ITE. These students would form the lower ability stratum of an FE college in England. It is estimated that about 90% of each cohort go on to upper-secondary education: the top 25% go to a junior college, the next 40% a polytechnic and the lowest 25% an ITE (Law 2010). There is – in theory – mobility between tracks in Singapore, but this is difficult to achieve in practice.

With respect to citizenship education, there is a tradition of political education in England where personal autonomy is a goal. Schools are required to teach young people ‘key features of parliamentary democracy and government’ and the actions they can take to influence decisions, as well as to provide opportunities for young people to participate in ‘school-based and community-based citizenship activities’ and ‘individual and collective action’ (QCA 2007a, 32, 34, 2007b, 46, 48). In recent years, there has also been an emphasis on community cohesion and volunteering.

In Singapore, schools are required to teach a ‘basic understanding’ of:

- the Constitution
- the Parliamentary system
- the Elected presidency
- the Role of citizens in the electoral process
- the Roles and responsibilities of the Government and citizens (CPDD 2006, 32).

Compared to the UK curriculum, there is a stronger emphasis on conveying a set of prescribed values and messages, for example ‘nation before community and society above self’, upholding ‘meritocracy and incorruptibility’, the need to defend Singapore and so on (CPDD 2006, 32).

In the next section, we look at vocational students with respect to their experience of education in England and Singapore.

Findings from the descriptive statistics

The survey questionnaire included items relating to efficacy and students' intention to participate in elections in the future. These items come from scales developed and tested for validity by the International Association for the Evaluation of Education Achievement (IEA), and were used in the IEA CIVED (Civic Education Study) 1999 and ICCS 2009 studies. The first of the scales is referred to as 'internal political efficacy' (Schulz et al. 2010, 117). The questions that we used from this scale are described below.

The question on political self-efficacy asked young people to rate the following statements:

- 'I know more about politics than most people [in my age group]'
- 'When political issues or problems are being discussed, I usually have something to say'
- 'I am able to understand most political issues easily'
- 'I am interested in politics'

The range of answers were:

<Agree strongly><Agree><Neither agree nor disagree><Disagree>
Disagree strongly>< Don't know>

The Cronbach Alpha score, a measure of reliability, was above 0.8 for both countries for this scale, indicating a strong reliability for this item in both countries.

The second IEA scale was 'Confidence in school participation in school' (Schulz and Sibberns 2004, 115). From an examination of the items in the scale, we decided that it actually measured collective efficacy within the school setting.

The question on collective (school) efficacy asked young people whether:

- 'Electing students representatives to suggest changes in how the school is run makes it better'
- 'Lots of positive changes happen in this school when students work together'
- 'Organizing groups of students to state their opinion could help solve problems in this school'
- 'Students acting together [in groups], can have more influence on what happens in this school than students acting alone by themselves'

The range of answers were:

<Agree strongly><Agree><Neither agree nor disagree><Disagree>
Disagree strongly>< Don't know>

The reliability of the scale was calculated, giving a reasonable score of above .79 for both countries.

The IEA scale on electoral participation was used to measure voting (Schulz et al. 2010, 191). Young people were asked:

When you are older, what do you expect that you will do?

- ‘Vote in national elections’
- ‘Get information about candidates before voting in an election’

The range of answers was:

<I will certainly not do this><I will probably not do this>
<I will probably do this><I will certainly do this>

The scale had an alpha reliability of above .79 in both countries, which is reasonably strong for this type of data.

The scales were created by summing the response categories scores and then transforming the total on a scale between 0 and 10. The resulting scales had the advantage of both allowing for easy cross-national comparisons and assessing absolute aggregate scores. This scale is used in Figures 1–3 – a score above 5 would be considered positive.

The results of the indicators are tabulated below.

Table 1 shows that the mean for the Technical College was higher than that for the FE college on all three indicators – political self-efficacy, collective

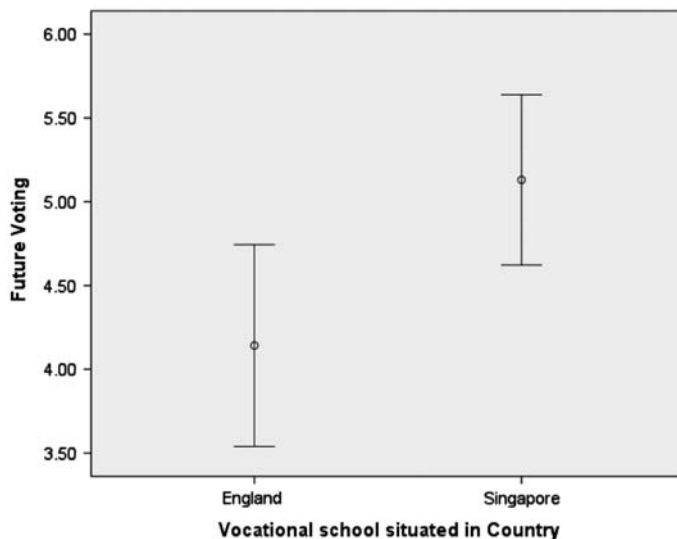


Figure 1. Future voting: England and Singapore.

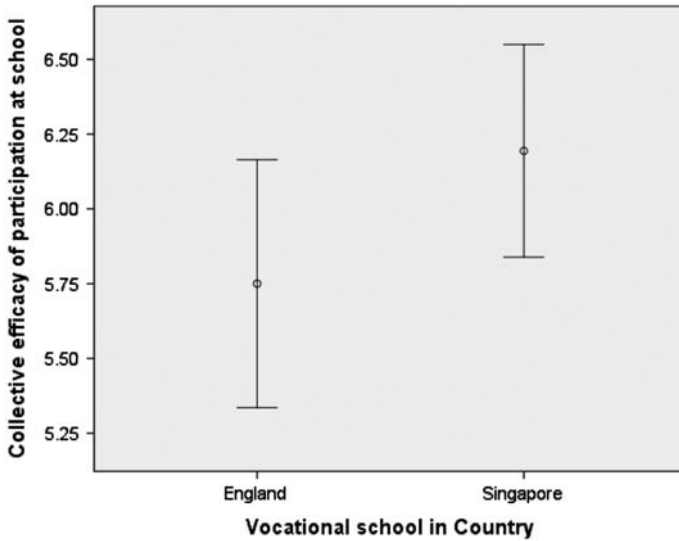


Figure 2. Collective (school) efficacy.

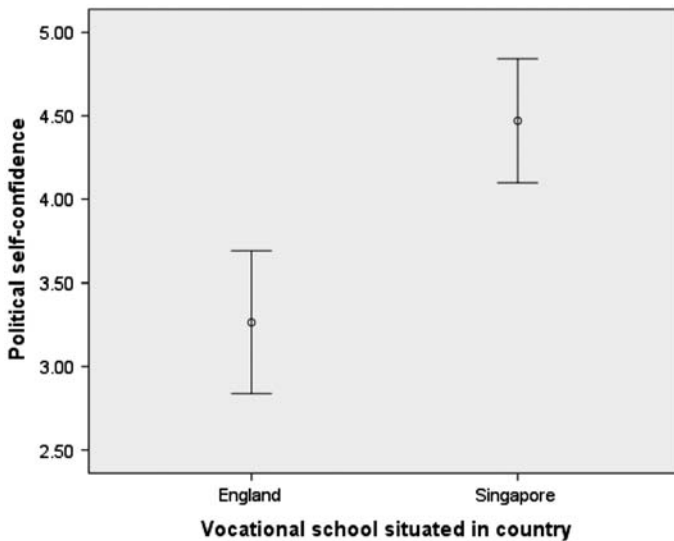


Figure 3. Political self-efficacy.

(school) efficacy and future voting (4.47, 6.19 and 5.13 for Singapore, and 3.26, 5.75 and 4.14 for England). A *t*-test showed significant differences between the two countries for the results for political self-efficacy, but not collective (school) efficacy.⁶

The ICCS 2009 survey collected data in 2009 on 140,000 Grade 8 students and 62,000 teachers in 38 countries to establish the ways in which

Table 1. Indicators by institution.

	Technical College (Singapore)					Further Education College (England)				
	<i>N</i>	Min	Max	Mean	SD	<i>N</i>	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Political self-efficacy	92	0.00	8.75	4.47	1.80	85	0.00	10.00	3.26	1.97
Collective (school) efficacy	101	0.00	10.00	6.19	1.80	80	0.00	8.75	5.75	1.86
Future voting	115	0.00	10.00	5.13	2.75	101	0.00	10.00	4.14	3.05
Valid <i>N</i> (listwise)	88					75				

Table 2. Correlations.

Country			Political self-efficacy sum index	Collective (school) efficacy sum index	Future voting sum index
England	Political self-efficacy sum index	Pearson Correlation	1	.370*	.502*
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.000
		<i>N</i>	85	76	84
England	Collective (school) efficacy sum index	Pearson Correlation	.370*	1	.442*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		.000
		<i>N</i>	76	80	79
England	Future voting sum index	Pearson Correlation	.502*	.442*	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
		<i>N</i>	84	79	101
Singapore	Political self-efficacy sum index	Pearson Correlation	1	.345*	.162
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.122
		<i>N</i>	92	88	92
Singapore	Collective (school) efficacy sum index	Pearson Correlation	.345*	1	.384*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		.000
		<i>N</i>	88	101	101
Singapore	Future voting sum index	Pearson Correlation	.162	.384*	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.122	.000	
		<i>N</i>	92	101	115

Note: *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

countries prepared young people to be future citizens. The survey found that the average percentage of 14-year-olds who would expect to vote was 82% and who would get information about candidates was 76% (Schulz et al. 2010, 143).

Given that 5 is the neutral point, and anything above this indicates a positive attitude to the indicator in question, the figure for future intention to vote was 5.1 for Singapore and 4.1 for England (Figure 1). Hence, vocational students from England and Singapore aged 16 and above are less likely to vote in future elections compared to the average 14-year-old in the ICCS study.

We performed a correlation analysis and Table 2 shows that both political self-efficacy and collective (school) efficacy are correlated with future voting in England, whereas only the latter is in Singapore. This suggests that, in Singapore, contextual political factors are more important than political self-efficacy in the decision to vote. The results also raise interesting questions as to why the lowest performing vocational group of students in Singapore would score higher on indicators of efficacy and participation compared to a group in England with a slightly wider spread of ability.

Data from the interviews

In this section, we draw from the richer data of the interviews to explain the quantitative findings. We look especially at the experiences of inequality as these are likely to influence levels of efficacy, as well as the intention to vote.

Experience of schooling

Some young people in both countries came from backgrounds that had had a negative effect on their past and current academic achievement. At the FE college, Karen,⁷ who was doing a course in make-up, worked 30–45 hours a week to support herself through college. She was aware that some of her friends received more moral and financial support from their parents than she did:

Their parents buy [the hairbrushing kit] for them. But then my dad doesn't. I don't get anything from my dad.

Sally (FE), too, recognised the difference in terms of family support between her and her friend who went to a sixth form college:

She comes from a better background. Her mum and dad are still together; they've got their own business; they've saved up from when she was a kid. ... So it's sort of she'll do better than me because she's got the financial support to do it, whereas I haven't.

While young people sometimes acknowledged that their contemporaries might have more supportive families than they did, loyalty to their family meant that they were reluctant to identify them as a source of educational disadvantage. Karen (FE) was a typical example:

I do in a way think it's unfair, but if I think about it, it's ... it's not really unfair because my family, they just don't have a lot of money, my dad don't work that much so. ... That's not unfair ...

In Singapore, students operating within the educational structure were sometimes unable to see the inequalities in it:

I think this [Technical College] is my first choice I got. ... For my secondary [school], also I got first choice ... (Noreen, Technical College)

However, students in Singapore are selected into lower-secondary school on the basis of their grades. Schools accept the highest aggregate scores they can and each year publish their cut-off point for this. Young people are realistic about their chances and will only apply to schools that will consider their score. Hence, when Noreen speaks of having had her first choice of school, she actually only had the first choice of schools *within her grade range, for which she could realistically have applied*. Nonetheless, she was genuinely pleased to have been given her 'first choice' of school, blind to the fact that she had had to operate within the rules of the system. The distinction as to whether a student goes to a school they would choose if they had genuine choice, or one for which they were eligible, is not merely one of semantics. For lower-performing students, the increasingly limited choices they have at each point of selection could arguably mean increasing and accumulative disadvantage.

The reason for placing students in a school and a track and stream with others of similar ability is to enable the school to cater for different learning needs. This is an argument that a number of the Singapore students accept:

Streaming is good because it's like trying to ... [help] the students to cope some of the subjects they don't like ... (Noreen, Technical College)

However, as will be seen, the difference in treatment may not always be to their benefit.

Young people handled being placed in the vocational track differently. Some of the English students retained a strong sense of self-efficacy with respect to learning:

I'm confident that I will get my grades. (Sally, FE)

I know that if I wanted to go and get the job I wanted, I could go and get it. It just means that I have to put effort into it. (Laura, FE)

However, a number of the Technical College students pointed to the effect of the highly selective system in Singapore and of having been placed in the bottom, vocational stream since their teens:

Interviewer: Were you happy in Normal Tech [Normal Technical]?

Skye (Technical College): Normal Tech, I wasn't that happy ah. ... Which parents would like their child to be in Normal Tech ... something about disgrace, ah, to the parents.

In addition, these Technical College students attributed their poor academic achievement, and the track they had been allocated, to their lack of ability or effort:

Skye: [Normal Tech] is like a code to say you are stupid, that you can't study.

Interviewer: But do you think you are [stupid]?

Skye: A bit of it ah, because I can't study ah, I really can't study ah.

It's my character that I can't stay focused for a long time. (Clifton)

In Singapore, therefore, the mantra of meritocracy, combined with that of the need to maximise human capital, appears to have reinforced students' self-blame and was used by some students to explain and justify inequalities in the education system:

The world is not fair, there is no such thing as fair. If one student is cleverer than another student, one is smarter, [has] higher IQ, and of course [he] can absorb more things, then of course you have to push him forward, you have to raise his limit. (James, Technical College)

There may be a sense in which, in trying to come to terms with the inequalities they experience, young Singaporeans resort to the Just World hypothesis, in which they justify these inequalities by either 'talking up' the beneficiary or 'derogating' the victim (Rubin and Peplau 1973), in this case, even if they had lost out in the system.

Hence, there was sometimes an inability or unwillingness to see inequality or injustice, whether this was to do with family circumstances or education provision and treatment. On occasion, students even attempted to justify the inequalities they experienced.

Students in both countries believed that those who were less well-behaved or less able were discriminated against when it came to the way they were treated by the school or teachers. Students at the FE college reported both forms of discrimination:

Yeah, this college is the bums' college, so it's all the courses that you don't need any GCSEs to get on to. ... I'm doing an NVQ which is paper-based. ... Like someone I work with will write '[Andrea] used the photocopier today', and then they'll sign it, and then I'll bring it in and put it in my folder. That's it, that is the whole course. (Andrea)

If you're in, like, a louder group, and people are a bit more quiet, the teachers always favour them over the loud people all the time. (Karen)

In general, FE college students spoke in terms of discrimination with regard to behavioral reputation, with those with a bad reputation being punished

more severely for the same offence. In contrast, the Singapore students spoke more in terms of how resources tended to go to the more able students:

My secondary school, right, if they have lack of teachers, right, they will let the teacher go teach the Express [class], then the Normal Tech [class] will go to the hall, and sit for the whole period. (Estelle)

They [the teachers] are responsive only to certain students like, let's say, the good students. ... If you are average or below average, you are nothing to them. (Reena)

The implications for the differences in treatment for vocational track students in England and Singapore will be explored in the Discussion section.

Experience of collective (school) participation

In this and the next section, we describe students' experience of collective (school) participation, as well as their sense of political self-efficacy.

The quantitative data show that young people from the vocational track in England and Singapore were positive about collective (school) action or, at least, the idea of it (Figure 2). The view appeared to be that solidarity and common action would change things in school for the better. In the interviews, however, the students' views were more complex, and students in both countries expressed reservations with regard to participation in school:

I wouldn't bother [to change anything in school] because I'd just be knocked back ... I won't get anywhere. ... While I'm in education I just feel like no-one will hear me. (Sally, FE)

They [the Student Council] hold events, major events lah, and they, um, basically enforce discipline. ... They act as like your spokesperson, your middleman, to deliver the message to your principal. ... Once in a while ... they will hold everybody together ... to voice out their opinion. (Keng Soon, Technical College)

Students from both counties had doubts, therefore, as to the effectiveness of student representation within their school. The range of activities at the Technical College seemed particularly limited and passive, with the functions of the school council being described as an event organiser, an intermediary between student and management and, even, an enforcement arm of school discipline. When a mass meeting was organised for students to express their views, one of the students spoke of the need for self-restraint:

Usually people will keep [their views] to themselves, unless they really cannot keep [these] to themselves, then they will just 'blah' everything. Common sense, correct? They will hold [it all in], [they] cannot just 'blah' out everything. (Keng Soon)

In terms of citizenship values, therefore, the Singapore students were very passive. They could petition the authorities for something they wanted. But, should they fail to get this, they would swallow their frustration. Political observers may consider this to be a form of socialisation suited for participation in a society where 'out of bounds' markers determine the issues that may be raised and the manner in which this may be done (Lim 2006). Han (2010) has also observed that, in Singapore, political participation is differentiated according to education track. The aims of National Education state that, while junior college students are expected to be able to 'make enlightened comments and proposals about what would be good for Singapore', ITE students should focus on 'working hard, continually upgrading themselves and helping to ensure a stable social order' (MOE 2004). It could therefore be the case that the education system has been successful in socialising the latter group with respect to their given outcome and produced a group that is self-restrained and amenable to being led by more able individuals, and who will not cause social problems.

Hence, students in both countries did not have much interest in school participation. They saw little point in it as they did not consider themselves or school organisations to have much effect on school policy and practice. If anything, the interview data reflected a sense of passivity and powerlessness among students in both countries. This was arguably stronger among the Singapore group, who spoke in addition of the need for self-restraint and self-censorship. Hence, the correlation of collective (school) efficacy with future voting in Singapore could not be explained by an experience of greater student participation and empowerment in school.

Expectations with regard to future political participation

Young people in both countries were generally negative with respect to their political self-efficacy (Figure 3). For Bandura (1995), perceived self-efficacy refers to 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations' (2). Therefore, if students do not feel they know much about politics relative to people their age, have little interest in it, are not able to understand political issues easily and have no views on such issues, then their political self-efficacy is low. Bandura's prediction is that, because such people tend to 'view insufficient performance as deficient aptitude, it does not require much failure for them to lose

faith in their capabilities' (11). Low political self-efficacy is therefore a concern for active citizenship.

When it came to future voting, England's score was negative, while Singapore's barely rose above positive (see Figure 1). The latter is surprising considering that there is a statutory requirement in Singapore to vote. It is possible that, with the voting age at 21, the act of voting was still a vague and distant prospect for the interviewees, most of whom were in their late teens.

In general, students in the vocational track in England were not very interested in politics, or in what was then the forthcoming general election:

I've never been interested ... I think that there's no matter what my point of view is, it's not going to change anything ... (Karen)

I don't care about politics. ... In my eyes it doesn't affect me. ... There's nothing we can say about it because to them we're no-one, we're a nobody. (Sally)

While the Singapore students also felt ineffectual with respect to the political process, they felt in addition that they had to take into consideration what was permitted by the government:

For harmless opinion I am sure they [the government] will listen ah. [It's] just whether you want [to say anything], and whether they allow it. (Hamas)

The Singapore students also had particular reasons for not participating in the general election:

I think Jurong⁸ [will have a] walkover, lah. Nothing to participate if it's going to be a walkover [laughs]. ... Basically the opposition parties [are] all in disarray. I don't see any possible new government. (James)

PAP is always the one winning, so [there] is no point [in participating]. (Daphne)

Between 1988, when the GRCs were introduced, and 2011, when the interviews were carried out, 0–10% of single constituencies and 23–71% of GRCs were uncontested at general elections, with the result that these were walkovers for the PAP (see Elections Department Singapore 2012b). Over the same period, the PAP held 95.1–98.8% of seats in Parliament (see Channelnews Asia 2011). There was therefore considerable substance to the students' view that political participation was a futile exercise: they had seen very little change in their lifetime and did not anticipate much more by way of change as long as the PAP remained in power.

In summary, political self-efficacy among students in both countries was generally low and there was a sense of powerlessness with respect to influ-

encing political outcomes. The political apathy of young people is unsurprising in light of the research, particularly in Western Europe (Hoskins, Villalba, and Saisana 2012). What was interesting in the case of Singapore were the comments relating to the dominance of the PAP and the unlikely prospect for change as long as it remained a force in politics. In addition, political participation as conceived by the Singapore students was also more restricted compared to the views expressed by the students in England, as seen from the references to perceived boundaries and the need for self-censorship. Given this, it is not surprising that political self-efficacy has little association with future voting in Singapore. After all, if the political force that is the PAP is such that very little change can be effected in its overwhelming presence, then no amount of political nous will make any difference to the political scene.

Discussion

We observed at the start of the article that the scores for England and Singapore with respect to future voting were significantly lower than the ICCS international average. While the latter dealt with 14-year-olds and the former with young people aged 16+, the difference could be indicative. Our study also produced findings that appeared counter-intuitive: the fact that the scores for political self-efficacy, collective (school) efficacy and future voting were higher for Singapore than England, the fact that the lowest-performing group of students in Singapore would score higher on future voting compared to the English group and the fact that, while both political self-efficacy and collective (school) efficacy were correlated with future voting in England, only the latter was correlated in the case of Singapore.

The interview data only shed partial light on these findings. In this section, we proceed in a more speculative manner and propose other explanations for them.

Low levels of intention to vote

With regard to the low levels of intention to vote in England and Singapore, there are two theoretical explanations for this: first, individuals need to have a reason to vote and to know that any changes they wish to make are within their sphere of influence; second, individuals need to feel part of the system to engage in the norms of it.

With respect to the first explanation, the interview data showed how both the English and Singapore students tended not to see inequalities. For the former, this was particularly true in relation to their family circumstances. For the latter, this related more to their school experience. If students either did not perceive inequalities, or were in denial about these, then they would lack a reason to participate.

With regard to the second explanation, two theories have been advanced. Van de Werfhorst's (2007) theory is that vocational students are not part of the system and feel alienated from it, particularly those who have been placed in the vocational stream for long periods. In contrast, CEDEFOP argues that vocational socialisation helps construct strong professional identities and results in a sense of greater connectedness with the community.

There was a fundamental difference in the way vocational education was approached at the FE college and the Technical College. At the former, the approach was liberal and *laissez-faire*. Young people were provided with course information and there was generally respect for individual autonomy and choice. The approach taken by the college was also as much 'welfare' as academic or job fit. The idea appeared to be to keep students – sometimes students with a troubled schooling history – in education. One way was to provide courses in which students were interested, regardless of whether these produced marketable skills. A Sports Academy lecturer expressed the hope that his students would complete their course and then take up another one that would lead to employment. As far as educational segregation was concerned, the students might have experienced ability banding in their secondary school within a comprehensive system. The more complete segregation occurred at the upper-secondary level, when students went to the FE college while some of their schoolmates went to a sixth form college.

In Singapore, the overarching concern in education is the reduction of 'wastage' – in other words, young people leaving school with little or no formal qualifications and thus being lost to the job market – as well as producing the skills needed by the economy (MOE 1979; Gopinathan 2007). Tracking and streaming had been introduced with the view to reducing such 'wastage'. While the intention is to cater for different learning needs, the practice can mean a degree of socioeconomic segregation in that middle-class children tended to get into better schools and higher streams (Chang 2011). Having said that, segregation in terms of ability within schools is not absolute, as children from different tracks are given opportunities to participate in co-curricular and other activities together. As is the case in England, a more complete form of segregation occurs at the upper-secondary level, when young people are selected into the ITE, polytechnic or junior college.

In contrast with the FE college, the priority at the Technical College was not the accommodation of students' interests. Courses were developed in consultation with employers and the sole consideration was projected skills needs in the economy. However, this could mean that the average Technical College student is more likely to get a job than an FE student. Unfortunately, there was no evidence from the interviews as to whether the job fit meant that the Singapore students' vocational identity was more strongly enhanced compared to the FE students.

In summary, our data are not derived from a random sample, and are therefore non-representative. At the same time, the evidence is mixed. Van de Werfhorst's (2007) argument is that, for students in the vocational track, tracking results in long separation from the more academic groups and higher social classes and results in lower political and democratic outcomes. Singapore students in general experience a higher degree of selection, more tracking and at an earlier age than those in England. However, the job-oriented approach of the Technical College, combined with better job prospects, could mean a lower sense of social alienation. The CEDEFOP's theory would be to attribute this to a greater connectedness with the community arising from their sense of vocational identity. However, more research would need to be done with respect to vocational identity to establish whether this is the case in Singapore.

Higher mean scores for political self-efficacy, collective (school) efficacy and future voting in Singapore

The finding that the Singapore students scored higher on collective (school) efficacy, political self-efficacy and future voting than the English group was counter-intuitive for several reasons. First, citizenship education in Western societies like the UK promotes autonomy as a personal goal and has traditionally incorporated elements of political education. Conventional wisdom also has it that a focus on teaching values, and a higher degree of socialisation in Singapore, together with the more authoritarian political system, would result in less by way of political self-efficacy. In addition, there is a longer and stronger tradition of school participation in countries like the UK, which would lead one to expect a higher level of collective (school) efficacy. Hence, the Singapore students' higher score of collective (school) efficacy flies in the face of expectation.

Perhaps it should be borne in mind that students completing a questionnaire do so from their own socio-political context. If the students were making any comparisons, they were doing this not cross-nationally, but from their experience of different domains of their life. Hence, it may be the case that, *within their own socio-political environment*, the Singapore students felt fairly positive with respect to political self-efficacy and collective (school) efficacy – more so than the English students in *their* environment – and this is what is reflected in the survey data.

The form of citizenship education that the students experienced could also have played a role. Using the concepts developed by Crick and Lister (see Crick 1978), Han (1997) has argued that Western societies like the UK generally promote procedural values such as tolerance, respect for difference, respect for diversity and so on. In contrast, east Asian societies tend to teach an explicit set of substantive values, for example respect for elders, meritocracy and so on. This has arguably resulted in a more socialised population,

that is, one that is more accepting of inequalities as being the natural outcome of 'meritocracy'. There is also, in Singapore, a policy of adopting different education outcomes for different sections of the school population. Some may interpret the outcome for students on the lowest, vocational rung as cultivating a particularly docile group of future citizens. The degree of socialisation of these students, and the acceptance of their place in the social and economic pecking order, could mean a higher level of compliance and, hence, of willingness to participate in voting. In other words, the young Singaporeans accept that it is their duty to vote and would feel an obligation to do so regardless of their sense of political self-efficacy. This could explain their higher future voting score relative to the English group.

The correlation of collective (school) efficacy with future voting in Singapore

The finding that both political self-efficacy and collective (school) efficacy are correlated with future voting in England is no surprise. While Bandura does write about self-efficacy as being domain specific, other scholars propose the concept of general self-efficacy – 'a broad and stable sense of personal competence to deal effectively with a variety of stressful situations' (Scholz et al. 2002, 243). Scholz et al. believe that, while self-efficacy 'should be conceptualised in a situation-specific manner ... the degree of specificity of generality varies with the context' (243). In other words, the forms of efficacy relating to school and political activity share similarities (e.g. belief in the ability of the individual or group to address an issue) and this explains why both forms of efficacy can be correlated with an inclination to vote.

In the case of the Singapore students, however, only collective (school) efficacy was correlated with future voting. It was earlier shown that there was a stronger sense of powerlessness in the Singapore students in the school context than the English group. Therefore, the higher level of collective (school) efficacy for this group does not reflect more democratic or effective forms of participation in school. In any case, their collective (school) efficacy was only marginally – and not significantly – higher than that in England. Instead, the fact that only collective (school) efficacy is associated with future voting in Singapore is more likely to be a comment on how deeply the political system and practices have affected the way young people view political participation. The result is that, limited though school participation may be, young people have more faith in collective effort than individual competence when it comes to the political sphere. Put another way, the relevant contextual factor is the political system in Singapore and the PAP's dominance on the political landscape. Hence, even though the Singaporeans were not particularly empowered in school, their collective (school) efficacy was still more relevant to voting, given the indi-

vidual powerlessness they felt in the political domain. In this context, those who thought they could be more politically effective working collectively than individually were more likely to vote.

The finding that experience of even limited school participation can be significant in terms of future voting, is consistent with the writings of Haste (2004) and Veugeliers and Vedder (2003) with respect to experiences of democracy in school and future engagement. Indeed, the evidence from our data suggests that even limited experiences of democracy and engagement in school may be enough, as seen in the case of Singapore.

Conclusion

This paper set out to explain some counter-intuitive findings in our study: first, the higher scores of political self-efficacy, collective (school) efficacy and future voting among the Singapore vocational students relative to the English students; second, the fact that the lowest performing students in Singapore scored higher on future voting than the group in England; and third, the fact that only collective (school) efficacy was correlated with future voting in Singapore. We argued that both groups tended not to perceive some of the inequalities they experienced, and so would lack a motive for political participation. The evidence was, unfortunately, inconclusive as to whether the formation of a vocational identity and, with this, greater connectedness with the community, could explain the Singapore students' greater likeliness to vote. We suggested other explanations, such as degree of socialisation in Singapore, as well with the teaching of a set of explicit, substantial values that included meritocracy. Finally, we argued that the correlation in Singapore of collective (school) efficacy with future voting did not mean more democratic or effective forms of participation in schools, but was, rather, a comment on the structure of the political system and the dominance of the PAP, so that young people had more faith in collective effort than individual competence when it came to the political sphere.

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Notes

1. See page 7 for a description of the education tracks in Singapore.
2. This survey was conducted in the mid-1990s among 15,000 individuals from 17 countries (Belgium, Chile, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany,

- Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Switzerland, the UK and the USA).
3. The European Community Household Panel is a longitudinal dataset between 1994 and 2001; the data includes young people aged 16 and above.
 4. The generic and actual names of the schools have been changed to anonymise the institutions and participants.
 5. This is equivalent to a sixth form college in the UK.
 6. Please contact the authors for results of the *t*-test.
 7. For each excerpt from the interviews, the (changed) name of the student is given, followed by the initials 'FE' for 'Further Education college, England' or 'Technical College for 'Technical College, Singapore'.
 8. Jurong is one of the Group Representation Constituencies.

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