

**CITIZENSHIP IN ACTION:  
YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE 2010-2011  
NEW ZEALAND EARTHQUAKES**

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**ABSTRACT**

Young people's declining civic and political participation is the subject of much public and media angst. This article argues for a fresh look at the concern. Evidence to support a new way of viewing participation is drawn from a study of the way in which young people (early-teens to mid-twenties) spontaneously demonstrated their abilities to engage in civic and political actions in the aftermath of the devastating earthquakes that hit the New Zealand city of Christchurch and the surrounding district of Canterbury during 2010 and 2011. The actions of these young people is set first in the context of relevant research, focusing on literature that critiques or offers alternative explanations of young people's seeming lack of engagement in civic and political activities. This is followed by a study of the collective actions motivated and managed by young people after the New Zealand earthquakes, such as the Student Volunteer Army and the Ministry of Awesome. These actions are theorised against several explanatory frameworks in order to promote an understanding of a more youth-centric view of young people's participation.

**KEY WORDS**

Youth engagement; Participatory citizenship; Disaster responses.



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# Citizenship in Action: Young People in the Aftermath of the 2010-2011 New Zealand Earthquakes

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## INTRODUCTION

University students sometimes get a bad rap; they are most likely to be seen on the television news partying, living in squalid flats or protesting about fee rises. But in the wake of the devastating quake, thousands of students put down their beers and books to lend a hand to those in need (The Press, 2011, p. 119).

In 2010 and 2011, the Canterbury region of New Zealand, including the city of Christchurch, was hit by a series of major earthquakes. One of the strong memories the people of Christchurch have to this day is of crowds of young people dressed in shorts and T-shirts, wearing gumboots, carrying shovels and pushing wheelbarrows, descending on their streets and working away until their hands were raw. These thousands of young people won the respect and admiration of locals and the media. The Student Volunteer Army became a blueprint for youth-centred disaster response activities, nationally and internationally. This article first sets the young people's civic engagement in the context of relevant research literature, before describing in detail the collective actions motivated and managed by young people (early-teens to mid-twenties) after the Canterbury earthquakes. These actions are

then theorised against several explanatory frameworks in order to promote a more youth-centric view of young people's participation and extrapolate the implications for citizenship education.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on citizenship, citizenship education and civic participation is vast. In order to keep the summary of the literature for this article relevant, it has been limited in scope to more recent studies, studies from New Zealand (or contexts similar to those of New Zealand) and with a focus on young people's civic or political understandings and behaviours. No attempt was made to engage in debates on what citizenship is, its origins, or the role of education in promoting citizenship. These matters are well discussed and debated elsewhere. The focus here is on empirical studies which attempted to go beyond a normalising rhetoric of what good citizenship *should* look like to attempting to understand it from the perspective of young people themselves, in order to contextualise the events described later in the article.

Studies aiming to critique the view that young people's participation is in decline often begin by citing the literature that promotes these claims (see for example, Bourn, 2008; Harris, Wynn & Younes, 2007; Keating, Benton & Kerr, 2011; Martelli, 2013; Wood, 2012). Martelli suggests that young people's perceived lack of engagement "has represented, in the last few decades, a source of perplexities and fears by adults as to continuity and social cohesion in contemporary society" (2013, p. 3). Hartras (2011) describes the situation this way: "Disaffection is typically ascribed to young people's lack of participation, display of anti-social behaviour, lack of social/civic engagement and subsequent marginalisation and general antipathy towards mainstream education and lifestyle" (p. 104). Thorson (2012) outlines what adults consider as the "normative core" of good citizenship such as gaining political knowledge, exercising the right to vote, and joining voluntary associations. She continues:

However, our discussions and debates about democratic ideals, valuable though they are, tell us little about the day-to-day lived experience of citizenship and almost nothing about whether today's young adults are well-resourced to think through what it means to be a good citizen within the swirling, choice-filled complexity that defines twenty-first century life (Thorson, 2012, p. 70).

In order to refute the claim that young people are disaffected or apathetic, writers often take one of two paths: they find explanations external to young people (for example, neoliberalism, globalisation or rising youth unemployment) or more internal explanations (for example, the tension between young people's earlier physical maturity and later social maturity). Martelli (2013), discussing the situation in Europe, explains that among the most common trends cited to explain the 'de-traditionalisation' and 'de-standardisation' of the concept of youth are: the delay of entry into adulthood, such as remaining at home for longer; the awareness of life's uncertainties, leading to a tension between autonomy and social dependence; and a growing gap between the culture and lives of youths and those of their parents' generation. He argues that youth should be seen as a resource rather than a problem, especially in a world of post-democracy where citizens are becoming further detached from politics and institutions. Harris, Wyn and Younes (2007) use external explanations: the breakdown in structured pathways to adulthood; the diminishing relevance of formal institutions; and the disintegration of traditional civic affiliations. Wood (2013) highlights the neo-liberal concept of participatory citizens as those who are valued by society for their contribution to economic growth, a model that marginalises many young people.

Research confirms that young people from low socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to engage in civic and political action and such discourses further alienate them. Summarising a range of literature, Bourn (2008) highlights themes of political devolution, economic migration, global terrorism and consumer culture as all affecting young people's views on citizenship and identity. Every day young people experience the forces of globalisation on their employment prospects, friendship patterns, use of technology and changing lifestyle.

Some writers include a rationalisation for the importance of young people's participation. They assert that this participation can have educational, personal development and societal benefits (Hartras, 2011). A rights-based justification to youth engagement, such as that promoted by Lansdown (1994, cited in Taylor, Smith & Gollop, 2008) centres on three sets of rights: participation, provision and protection. Taylor, Smith and Gollop go on to argue:

If children develop a belief in themselves as social actors who have some control over their own lives then they are less likely to depend on others for



coping with problems... Encouraging children to express their opinions and feelings about citizenship (and other issues) also signals respect for children as human beings (2008, p. 196).

The view of the pathway from youth to adulthood as a linear, step-by-step journey is seen as in need of revision (Keating, Benton & Kerr, 2011; Martelli, 2013). Writers also query views of young people as “not-yet-citizens” (Lawy & Bestia, 2006), “citizens-in-the-making” (O’Loughlin & Gillespie, 2012) or “pre-citizens” (Harris et al., 2007). Harris et al. ask:

Are they “bowling alone”, as per Putnam’s (2000) famous thesis: atomised and apathetic about politics, or are they creating new and exciting kinds of participatory practice using emergent technologies or their identities as consumers? (2007, p. 20).

A common theme in the literature highlights that participation is not unproblematic (Hartras, 2011). Micheletti and Stolle (2012) researched how notions of participation in citizenship are changing, especially among young people, as they engage in sustainable citizenship practices in which they take more responsibility for economic, environmental and equitable development through, for example, boycotting and ‘buycotting’ products and lifestyle choices.

Such writers ask if it still appropriate to judge young people’s participation by adult-centric measures. Wood (2012) critiques the traditional approach of measuring participation by standard criteria such as voting, joining groups and voluntary work. She states, “Many studies employing mainstream political definitions conclude that young people are largely disinterested in politics, disengaged from formal political activities and unlikely to participate in many future democratic processes” (p. 2). By viewing citizenship as a fluid process rather than a static position, she argues, adults can begin “[to] recognize the ambiguity, contradictions, and heterogeneous nature of citizenship understandings held by young people” (p. 12).

In bringing the research closer to the young people under investigation in this study, recent research provides an insight into New Zealand young people’s understanding of citizenship and their enactment of these understandings. The findings from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (Lang, 2010) show that New Zealand young people are generally well prepared for their roles as citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, although there

are variations among young people of differing gender, ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds.

In order to gain an insight into young people's thinking, Taylor, Smith and Gollop (2008) conducted focus group interviews in New Zealand schools. They used an activity in which the young people described citizenship rights and responsibilities in an imaginary country, which they created as part of the research task. The authors' analyses of the citizenship rights that the young people had highlighted in these imaginary countries were: the rights to respect and participation; safety and protection; and a healthy lifestyle. They also included access to education, economic resources and leisure activities. The responsibilities of citizens in these imaginary countries were grouped around good personal attributes, environmental awareness, working within societal norms and laws, altruism and volunteerism. The researchers concluded that, "children and young people are able to contribute meaningfully to discussions about their rights and responsibilities, to understand how people become citizens, and to participate positively in their homes, schools and communities" (Taylor, Smith & Gollop, 2008, p. 207).

In another New Zealand study, Wood (2012) also used a focus group methodology but through a more fluid café style approach, which began with open-ended statements and which were facilitated by the students themselves. She triangulated the findings from the focus groups by using photovoice, a method in which the participants used cameras to record and represent their everyday lives and then engaged in critical dialogue based on their chosen images. Wood found that young people grounded their concept of citizenship in ordinary activities as well as more strategic decisions and practices. A small decision to *do* or *not do* something, such as buy a particular brand, could represent a far bigger political or ethical consideration. She also found that young people's notions of citizenship were complex and dynamic, "in the process of being (re)formed and (re)constructed through peer-based discussion" (Wood, 2012, p. 10) and these notions were a regular part of their everyday social and citizenship actions. Wood concludes: "These everyday conversations give insights into how diverse young people also hold contested, multiple and complex understandings of citizenship, and that these understandings evolve in the context of social interactions and experiences" (Wood, 2012, p. 11).

Humpage (2008) undertook focus group research with a wider, more representative group of New Zealanders, which included but was not limited to



young people. She found that the notion of citizenship was not as important to New Zealanders' identity as notions of family or community. The participants, however, were able to clearly articulate what a 'good citizen' was. The strongest characteristic of a good citizen was community participation (volunteering, neighbourliness, caring for others and contributing to society). The second strongest characteristic reflected humanitarian attitudes (respect, reciprocity, compassion and egalitarianism) while being law abiding, having loyalty to one's country, and being democratically active were of lesser importance. Interestingly, Humpage found that neo-liberalism had not had as strong an influence on changing people's attitudes as is often claimed. She concludes:

Against predictions, the findings further suggest that neo-liberal reforms have not eliminated a belief in community spirit and collective solutions to social problems. Although New Zealanders do believe that individuals should be responsible for themselves, they also expect government to ensure the social and economic conditions that make this possible (Humpage, 2008, p. 121).

Australian and British studies offer similar findings. Harris et al. (2007) suggest that Australian young people "connect with civic life in new ways that are directly related to their more fragmented and individualised biographies" (p. 19). These new ways include less collective affiliation, greater use of emergent technologies and using recreation and consumer choice in political ways. Wearing (2011) suggests that Australia can learn from both European and British models that focus on inclusion of marginalised youth as a pathway to youth citizenship. This can be achieved by understanding the social, economic, institutional, territorial and symbolic factors at play. British studies cited by Bourn (2008) found that young people's identity was forged locally using family and friends as resources but expanded by cyberspace into creative, fluid and eclectic positions on social and global issues. Keating, Benton and Kerr's (2011) longitudinal study revealed that young people in England did become more politically active, such as on student councils, and civically engaged, for example through fundraising, as they moved through the schooling system, although with a dip in their mid-teens, possibly due to examination anxiety.

Finally, various writers offer new or amended explanatory frameworks in the hope that young people's participation might be better recognised,

understood, encouraged or celebrated. Lawry and Bestia (2006) suggest that a better way to view the acquisition of the state of citizenship is as a “cradle-to-the-grave” trajectory that all citizens, including young people, move through. Martelli also argues for a broader view of citizenship:

In fact, citizenship appears as a process relating both to the social and institutional practices applied in the political and judiciary sphere that affect people’s daily lives, and to the inclination of individuals and groups to provide meaning to citizenship in terms of belonging, identity and culture (2013, p. 3).

These frameworks and themes from the literature provide a context to examine the creative and innovative participatory and political actions of New Zealand young people in response to the recent earthquakes.

## BACKGROUND

On September 4, 2010, an earthquake measuring 7.1 magnitude on the Richter scale rocked the Canterbury region of New Zealand, including the city of Christchurch (pre-earthquake population approximately 400,000). It caused widespread damage to buildings and infrastructure. Liquefaction and flooding affected many areas and made moving around the city difficult. The quake caused billions of dollars’ worth of damage. Thousands of people were removed to emergency shelters in local schools and sports centres. It was expected the city and surrounding districts would take years to recover. Continuing aftershocks hampered much of the recovery effort.

Before the fragile city could recover, another shallow 6.3 magnitude aftershock on February 22, 2011, situated much closer to Christchurch’s city centre killed 185 people and left thousands more injured or homeless. The central business district was cordoned off, and a stunned city tried to come to terms with a bigger disaster, more damage, and an even longer recovery time. Several more major (6.3 magnitude) aftershocks in June and December amid the 12,000 on-going aftershocks, continued to damage the city, causing over 40 billion dollars’ worth of damage, shattering frayed nerves and hampering the recovery process.





## SEPTEMBER 2010: YOUNG PEOPLE MOBILISE

After the 7.1 earthquake struck Canterbury, on Saturday, September 4, 2010, many people used social networking media to contact friends and family and share their experiences. My son, who was a student at Canterbury University at the time, told me that someone had set up a Facebook page calling for student volunteers to help after the earthquake. I was very impressed with this initiative. Being the mother of a young person, I knew that they could sometimes be hard to motivate. I was even more impressed when my son returned home from his volunteering duties and I discussed his day with him and came to understand the size and the complexity of the operation. I got a better idea of the enormity of the logistics of organising, transporting, briefing, feeding, managing, and looking after the volunteers. As a citizenship education researcher, I saw this as “citizenship in action” and was determined to find out more. Over 2010 and 2011, I followed the progress of the student volunteers and this re-telling of their story is drawn from my interviews with Sam Johnson, the young person whose initiative created and sustained the volunteer effort throughout the Canterbury earthquake sequence. There are growing precedents for using a narrative style in reporting this type of research, see for example, Lewis and Gillis’ (2008) account of their Hurricane Katrina experiences.

At the time of the September 2010 earthquake, Sam Johnson was a university student studying law at Canterbury University. In his part of the city, despite the enormity of the September earthquake, access to the Internet was still available. With the university closed due to earthquake damage, he thought that there might be a way to channel student time and energy into helping those in need. One of the immediate challenges was the large amount of liquefaction (sand, silt and sludge, often mixed with sewage, forced up through cracks in the ground by the force of the earthquake, which spreads quickly and sets to a hard concrete-like mass).

After having no success with the formal earthquake response organisers (Civil Defence, the City Council, the Army, Urban Search and Rescue and later CERA, the government agency managing earthquake recovery), he set up a Facebook page called the Student Volunteer Base for Earthquake Clean Up. He invited his friends to join the clean-up effort and asked them to text or facebook all their friends. He encouraged them to search out shovels, wheelbarrows and gumboots. On the Monday after the earthquake, Sam arrived in



the suburb of Halswell. He expected to find about 60 student volunteers but over 300 turned up. On that first day, students had to use their own initiative to arrange transport and find out where and how they might help. By lunch-time, Sam became aware that the volunteers would need to be fed. The local supermarket had been hard hit and they were not sure if they would be able to provide food for the volunteers, as there was hardly enough for local families. Sam matched a donation of \$50 from a local resident with his own money and paid for bread to make sandwiches to get the volunteers through the day.

The next day, the student volunteer effort had grown and taken on a life of its own. As interest grew and replies came in, Sam and the core team of six student volunteers also spent time making sure that whatever they did met with official approval. They contacted Civil Defence, City Councillors and local Members of Parliament to ask where the best places to offer this help might be. The growing ranks of the student volunteers meant that the organisations charged with earthquake response and recovery needed to take the volunteers seriously. The volunteers were therefore asked to meet at a local school where they were briefed by Civil Defence and the Army to ensure that no-one – students or public – was put at risk. It was also important that everyone complied with the regulations related to the region's state of emergency.

One of the logistical problems, which Sam and his team then had to deal with, was how to keep track of everyone. If there was a major aftershock, everyone needed to be safe and accounted for. The students were asked to sign in and sign out. In order to do this accurately, they selected a mobile management system that could send and manage large numbers of text messages. Several student volunteers were then assigned to manage the text communication system.

By Tuesday night, the story of the student volunteers, who became known as the Student Volunteer Army, had been picked up by the media. This was to result in even more young people volunteering in the following days. It also brought in donations of money and goods, the largest of which was from the Ministry of Youth Development. This meant that costs of food, transport, water, hand sanitizer and cleaning up equipment could be covered. On Wednesday, after arranging buses, students were dispatched to several of the worst hit areas to assist with liquefaction and rubble removal. This effort continued every day for the next two weeks until the university and other educational institutions began to re-open.



Each day required logistical arrangements for transport, communication, funding, supplies, food, water, access and safety. Sam clocked up 44 hours on his cell phone with behind-the-scenes arrangements to keep everything running smoothly. Media reports suggested that over 3000 student volunteers from the two universities, the polytechnic and secondary schools had joined the ranks of the volunteers. Six weeks after the September quake, an analysis of media reports showed that the students' achievements during the earthquake had been praised by local and national politicians, including the Mayor and the Prime Minister. They had been reported on television and radio, appeared in local, national and international newspapers and on the Internet.

Once schools and other educational institutions were re-opened and young people went back to their studies, it would have been understandable if the volunteering effort ceased. But it did not stop there. A volunteering network was set up, so the impetus was not lost and a central team could recruit and manage student volunteers for on-going earthquake and non-earthquake projects.

#### YOUNG PEOPLE AS ROLE MODELS: FEBRUARY 2011 AND BEYOND

Fast forward to February of 2011. A large aftershock much closer to the centre of Christchurch devastated the city's business district and created new and further damage to the city and surrounding districts. Educational institutions were closed again for several weeks until arrangements were made for closures, temporary premises, relocations and site sharing. Despite tens of thousands of people fleeing the city, the Student Volunteer Army swung into action very quickly. This time the relationships with Civil Defence and the first response organisations were already in place and the Student Volunteer Army now had strong credibility. The infrastructure to manage large numbers of student volunteers, which had been created by trial and error in September, had been further refined through the volunteer network in the time leading up to the February quake.

Ironically, Sam was away at an emergency response conference at the time the February earthquake struck, but many of the original Student Volunteer Army members, including Jade Rutherford, were available. In September, Jade



looked after administrative tasks: organising the volunteers, fielding the calls and working with sponsors. In February, she managed the Facebook site and other communication links. “I oversaw all of the emails... this time everybody in New Zealand had my phone number”. When a national television channel advertised the Student Volunteer Army contact details, Jade recalls, “I literally just watched and there was like a 1000 emails or something in like five minutes” (Jade Rutherford, cited in Gordon, forthcoming).

Not only was it seen as a badge of honour for young people to be part of the Student Volunteer Army and earn a green volunteer T-shirt, the national airline, Air New Zealand, offered \$50 airfares to anyone who wanted to fly into Christchurch to help with the February clean-up. This swelled the ranks of student volunteers from the 3300 registered in September to varying reports of 15,000-18,000 young people from all over the country. The handful of students who managed the volunteering logistics in September grew to nearly a hundred operational staff who worked out of a large tent on the university’s grounds in February.

The volunteers shifted 360,000 tonnes of silt and sludge and contributed more than 75,000 working hours (The Press, 2011). The Student Volunteer Army also became a blueprint for how other volunteer organisations might operate. Many rural young people, for example, joined the 4000 strong Farmy Army set up by the Federated Farmers organisation that brought their heavy machinery to Christchurch to assist with clearing liquefaction and rubble. Many young people also worked in conjunction with relief organisations, such as the Red Cross, or community organisations, such as the Rangiora Express (an operation that helicoptered meals in to the hardest-hit suburbs) or local *marae* (Māori community centres). Others just helped out in their local street. In my neighbourhood, they came to the local supermarket to clean up the broken glass, to help in the library restacking books or to deliver relief supplies and disaster information to households.

The on-going aftershocks, especially in June and December, caused further damage. Many people described the 6.3 June quake, in the middle of an especially cold winter, as the one that “broke their spirit”. Many residents were faced with cleaning up liquefaction for the third time. The students continued to respond as best they could. Jade recalls, “June was really difficult because it was awful weather, it was exams or take home tests, whichever way it went, and we definitely had volunteer fatigue by that point; the



students had a terrible start to the year and the semester was ending on a bad note as well” (Jade Rutherford, cited in Gordon, forthcoming).

As 2011 came to an end and the immediate clean-up activities were winding down, the task of recovery and rebuilding began. Young people continued to be engaged in a range of creative post-earthquake initiatives. These included: Greening the Rubble (bringing colour and greenery to the vast tracts of demolished building sites and piles of rubble); Gap Filler (producing interesting and creative art works and activities that brought life to vacant spaces); and the Pallet Pavilion (a café and performance space created from re-cycled wooden pallets). Two of my favourites, because they encapsulate the ability of young people to ‘do good’ but without taking themselves too seriously were the Ministry of Awesome and the activities of superhero, Flat Man. The Ministry of Awesome was an offshoot of the Student Volunteer Army, which aimed to make use of the creative and innovative spirit shown by young people in response to the earthquakes and, perhaps, turn these entrepreneurial ideas into successful businesses. The anonymous university students, known as Flat Man and the Quake Kid, delivered food parcels, alongside the Red Cross, to struggling families and quake-hit residents. Their efforts caught the eye of a local businessman who donated a 1970 yellow Chevrolet Camaro, which, as the Flatmobile, assisted with these deliveries (Anderson, 2013). The organisers of these and other initiatives were often able to gain funding from government, businesses and charities to assist with their activities. In 2013, many of these initiatives are still operating with new ones continuing to spring up as the city moves through the recovery and rebuilding phases.

In 2013, the Student Volunteer Army is still active. Students at Canterbury University can join the army as a university club and two of the founding members, Sam Johnson and Jason Pemberton have gone on to create the Volunteer Army Foundation (VAF). This year, the VAF co-ordinated a free rock concert for volunteers. In return for four hours of donated time on particular projects, volunteers earned free tickets to the concert. Although aimed at young people, the opportunity to continue volunteering was taken up by a wide selection of the city’s population: “We had truck drivers, plumbers and tradies [tradespeople] and many retirees. A couple of ladies in their 70s came and said the concert was part of their ‘bucket list’” (Jason Pemberton, cited in McCrone, 2013).

Following the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan in March 2011, Japanese students asked, via Facebook, if someone could come to Waseda Univer-

sity to assist in setting up a similar student volunteer scheme. Sam and Jason gained sponsorship to fly to Japan to help out. Similarly, in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy in New York, Jason and Jackson Rowland answered the call to help students there contribute to the hurricane clean-up effort. The efforts of Sam, Jason, Jade, Jackson and others have been recognised locally, nationally and even internationally. The Student Volunteer Army has been recognised at various municipal and national award ceremonies. Sam received a Sir Peter Blake leadership award, a Communicator of the Year award and, in 2012, was selected as Young New Zealander of the Year.

In summarising what he had learned from his experience, Sam highlighted several important factors. One was that although the language was of the army (squadrons, battalions and troops), the structure was not hierarchical. There was a central core group and then layers of overlapping groups spreading out in concentric circles. In September 2010, there were six students in the central group who each had their own core functions but also had an understanding of how the organisation functioned as whole. In February of 2011, this central team expanded to 15 and was supported by a further 70 administrators.

The groupings of students were organised flexibly around tasks that needed to be done at any one time (answering phones, obtaining equipment, providing transport, delivering food, shovelling liquefaction or fixing the wheelbarrows). By allowing students to opt in and out and work with the skills and interests they had, it was easier to create a sense of ownership of the task and keep up their motivation.

A further way of keeping up motivation was to organise the tasks so that the students could see the fruits of their labour quickly. Thus, rather than spreading the volunteers too thinly, they would put a group of 20 to work on a property and within an hour or two the difference could be clearly seen.

Being students themselves, the organising group knew what young people needed: food, drink, music and fun. Once the word got out, there was no shortage of donations of food. One incident Sam recalls was of a truckload of baking for the volunteers arriving from a small town some distance away. Sam commented, “Not even we could eat that much home baking!” There was more than enough to keep the students fed and happy so they divided it up and delivered parcels of baking to each house in the areas in which they were working.



Finally, one of the most important tasks was to connect with and bring cheer to the communities, especially to those who had lost everything. The volunteers were overwhelmed by the response they received from locals and the volunteers certainly helped dispel the image of young people as self-centred and lazy. The current Student Volunteer Army (SVA) website has a section on the history of the organisation and they comment on the importance of the wider connection to the community:

While the central task was the mass-deployment of volunteers to shovel liquefaction from properties, a strong focus was put on the wellbeing of residents; showing a presence in the streets offering hot meals, clean water and guidance to professional assistance. The SVA also supplied and managed operations for various organizations including multiple government departments, Civil Defence, and city council. Our objective was to increase the efficiency in specific services, for example delivering chemical toilets and information pamphlets, laying sandbags, staffing data entry and manning call centres.<sup>1</sup>

## DISCUSSION

In this section, I take three theoretical frameworks and use these to examine the young people's actions more analytically. Firstly, I discuss Thorson's (2012) concept of citizenship vocabularies. Secondly, I consider the possibilities offered by Wood's (2013) notion of participatory capital and, thirdly, I relate these to Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) three views of the good citizen.

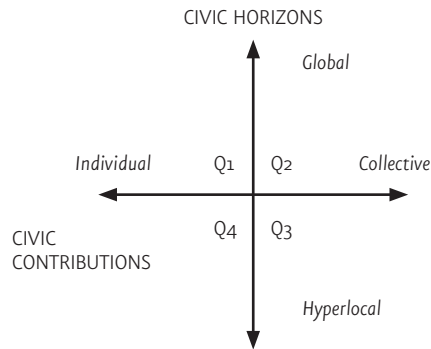
### CITIZENSHIP VOCABULARIES

Thorson's (2012) model is based on the assumption that how people understand themselves as citizens impacts their perceptions of their citizenship rights and obligations. She argues that this understanding can be examined through the notion of citizenship vocabularies, which reveal the possibilities that individuals consider that they have at their disposal. She claims

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.sva.org.nz/index.php/svatheclub>.

that it is the breadth of possibilities, and the flexible ways they can be utilised that is more important than their coherence.

FIGURE 1  
CONCEPTUAL MAP OF CITIZENSHIP VOCABULARIES



Source: Thorson, 2012, p. 74.

Thorson’s model (see Figure 1) has two intersecting axes creating four quadrants. The vertical axis indicates where young people’s citizenship vocabularies appear on a continuum of civic horizons. Thorson calls these “the imagined fields of action” (p. 74) – communities you feel you have membership with from hyperlocal through to global. The horizontal axis is a continuum of civic contributions from individual to collective. Four quadrants represent the “entanglement of civic contributions with civic horizons” (p. 74). In Quadrant 1 (Q1), a young person would imagine a good citizen as someone whose focus did not go beyond their immediate circle of family and friends. The emphasis would be on being a good person who looked after their family members and worked hard at their job. In Quadrant 2 (Q2), the imagined community is still at the local level but the possibilities include acting collectively. In Quadrant 3 (Q3), the outlook is global through collective action as part of an organised group. Quadrant 4 (Q4) returns the imagined responsibility to the individual but the focus is on how individual action could change the world.

Overall, the young people in this case study conceived the good as being one who acted individually or collectively for the good of others. Their volunteering responses to the Canterbury earthquakes displayed their ability to act in creative, innovative and flexible ways. In order to do this, they





needed the confidence to put their plans into action and a strong sense of autonomous decision-making.

Their post-earthquake activities, exemplified by highly original ideas such as Greening the Rubble, Gap Filler and the Ministry of Awesome, were further examples of their ability to imagine infinite possibilities. While some young people worked at the individual and hyperlocal level (Q1), it was engagement at the collective and community level (spanning quadrants 2 and 3) that captured their interest. The leaders of the Student Volunteer Army were later able to use the opportunities offered to them to move to the global level by taking their expertise to Japan and the USA, and since then, to a range of other international contexts. Understanding that young people can create possibilities through their citizenship vocabularies is a useful citizenship education concept to be further explored. This leads to Wood's (2013) notion of participatory capital.

#### PARTICIPATORY CAPITAL

Wood (2013) expands her argument for viewing young people's citizenship participation in new ways by drawing on Bourdieu, and posits the notion of participatory capital, which she describes as: "combined and interrelated social, economic and cultural capital related to the logic, network and practices of citizenship participation within a social field" (p. 2). Participatory capital can be seen as a resource for young people to draw on as they shape their civic imaginings. Wood's research showed that levels of economic, social and cultural capital impacted students' ability to see themselves as global citizens and those with fewer resources were limited to highly localised visions and practices. Thorson (2012) also suggests that not every young person has the same access to these possibilities and agrees that better education appears to be linked to the capacity to create expansive citizenship vocabularies.

While the young people who initiated and managed the Student Volunteer Army were university students, and therefore more likely to have succeeded in the education system and emerged with higher levels of social, cultural and economic capital, the volunteering movement captured the imagination of all sectors of society. As schools and other higher education institutions were closed for weeks at a time, it was understandable that students might volunteer first. It gave young people something to do but many were also

genuinely motivated by wanting to help. Other young people, whose employment was in hiatus due to much of the city being cordoned off, also joined the Student Volunteer Army, the Farmy Army and the many other grassroots initiatives. People who were still employed often joined the volunteering efforts in their weekends. Even as late as 2013, the “truck drivers, plumbers and tradies” mentioned by Jason were taking up the volunteering call. The levelling nature of the disaster context opened up these citizenship possibilities to a wider range of young people.

Wood also notes (2013, p. 15), “It was apparent that young people not only passively received participatory capital, but they also actively created and constructed participatory capital in a number of ways...” and she details the ways in which young people enacted their participatory capital by responding to issues and making changes in their local communities. The innovative and creative responses to the earthquakes highlighted that many young people did have extensive citizenship vocabularies (Thorson, 2012) and constructed participatory capital in unexpected ways. The creators of the Student Volunteer Army drew on complex and intricate understandings of social, economic and cultural capital to garner resources, harness energy, cultivate credibility and mobilise support. They used their technological inventiveness and political acumen to become a force to be reckoned with. Viewed through this lens, it brings a new understanding to the way in which young people not only navigate and negotiate their way to adulthood and its concomitant citizenship and political expectations but also adapt the rules of the game along the way. In order to consider the kinds of citizenship possibilities they might have at their disposal, it is helpful to examine Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) three views of citizenship.

### THREE CONCEPTS OF CITIZENSHIP

In their study, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) found that three views of the good citizen underpinned approaches to education for citizenship: *personally responsible*, *participatory* and *justice-oriented*. Programmes that aim to produce *personally responsible citizens* focus on individual character traits such as honesty, integrity, self-discipline, respect, courtesy and compassion. The assumption is that society will become a better place if everyone acts responsibly and with self-discipline. Programmes that aim to produce *participatory citizens* set out to encourage students to actively participate in school, community, local



and national affairs. Skills of communication, collaboration and facilitation are fostered to bring collective and creative solutions to societal problems. Thirdly, are programmes that promote *justice-oriented citizens*. In order to do this, it is important to go beyond an understanding of rules and laws or the functioning of government, to examine the social, political and economic forces that shape society and how these allow inequity and injustice.

The Canterbury earthquakes provided numerous examples of personally responsible citizens in the form of people who donated money and goods for disaster relief. The outpouring of grief and support was highly visible as ordinary New Zealanders found ways to communicate their empathy through words, gifts, money and services. Throughout the disaster recovery processes, there were also many examples of the participatory citizen. The earthquakes led to the mobilisation of students, farmers, communities and many others who set up volunteer groups to cover a wide range of needs. Finally, there were examples, although not as numerous, of the justice-oriented citizen who focused on underlying causes of injustice for those disadvantaged by decision making processes relating to earthquake response and recovery. Where do the actions of the young people who engaged in the many post-disaster volunteering activities fit?

Were they personally responsible citizens? The thousands of young people who contributed to the various formal and informal response, recovery and rebuilding activities acted with energy, commitment and compassion. But as Sam pointed out, it was significant that their participation was fluid; they could work when, where and as they wished. For some it helped fill in the time. With intermittent electricity, they were cut off from their electronic gadgets and with damage to the roads and infrastructure, going anywhere was difficult. Part of the motivation was also a sense of adventure, of doing something new and different. They were self-motivated and acted responsibly but they responded more willingly because the impetus came from themselves. There was no formal compulsion or expectation. Interestingly, it did become a peer expectation – a badge of honour – to be able to talk about your part in the clean-up activities. It was even reported that young people looking for local employment were asked whether they had been part of the Student Volunteer Army. While young people's immediate responses might satisfy some criteria for personally responsible citizenry, it was complicated by the fact that it was always on their terms. They were compassionate and hardworking but they were not helping out of a sense of compliance. In

fact, it was quite the opposite. The Student Volunteer Army was a grassroots initiative, self-generated, coordinated from within, managed through social media, with enough incentive to provide motivation but the flexibility to opt in and out at will; and this is precisely why it worked so well.

In what ways did these young people portray the characteristics of participatory citizens? There is no doubt that they displayed high levels of initiative, problem solving, facilitation, organisation, and collaboration. They harnessed social media to recruit, organise, manage and coordinate. The logistical management was detailed and complex and it was undertaken without training or technical facilities. No problem seemed insurmountable. Handled badly, thousands of student volunteers could have ended up being a hindrance to the disaster recovery process and a danger to themselves. Instead the Student Volunteer Army became an exemplar of creative and coordinated post-disaster civic participation.

Did their activities make them justice-oriented citizens? While most young people's actions probably fit into the participatory category, Sam and the other creators of the Student Volunteer Army found that to meet their goal of helping those underserved by the formal earthquake recovery system, they initially needed to by-pass traditional procedures and protocols. In order to channel the energy and enthusiasm of the hundreds of young people initially answering their call, they had to ignore the authorities and make their own rules. Had they followed orders and stayed at home, the Student Volunteer Army would have been no more than a handful of hardy souls pottering around in their local neighbourhoods. Because of the state of emergency, they did need to fall into line with approved ways of operating, but they were willing to challenge the command-and-control approach of the official post-disaster response machinery. That a group of highly-motivated and enthusiastic, if not slightly naïve, young people in green T-shirts could have something important to teach experienced disaster responders, not to mention local and national governments, is a lesson for us all.

## CONCLUSION

This article began by drawing attention to the literature that critiques the widespread belief that young people are disaffected, apathetic and uninterested in civic and political affairs. The literature highlights the need to un-



derstand more about how young people view and act in civic-minded ways and what it means to them to take political action. Some of the reasons for their alternative ways of enacting citizenship are external forces, such as the economic downturn, neo-liberal agendas, job uncertainty and limited future prospects. Other reasons include life's uncertainties, which have decreased their autonomy and increased their social dependence, leading to a delayed adulthood. Young people come to develop more flexible identities and fragmented loyalties. Traditional structures have not created a safe and equitable society, so they look beyond these structures and use new technologies to create and connect with communities of interest.

It is apparent, however, from a range of empirical studies, that young people do have clear and articulate views on citizenship and politics. These can vary from focusing on their immediate communities to engaging in global campaigns. While their political actions are more likely to be framed around everyday actions and choices rather than formal politics, they do become actively engaged in relevant issues and make more use of the formal political system as they get older.

A detailed description of the activities of young people in the aftermath of the devastating series of earthquakes in Canterbury, New Zealand in 2010 and 2011 provided a case study of spontaneous grassroots youth-centric civic and political action. These young people used a wide range of citizenship skills to motivate, engage and co-ordinate thousands of young people in volunteering efforts throughout the earthquake response and recovery sequence. They did this in spite of initial resistance from authorities and went on to create an effective mechanism for providing practical help and emotional support to hard-hit disaster communities.

Strikingly, they found ways to continue the momentum well beyond the time of immediate need and make volunteering an appealing and on-going community activity. A fifteen-year old I spoke to recently said he had clocked up 120 hours of volunteering since first joining the Student Volunteer Army. As Christchurch moved through the recovery and rebuilding phases, young people adapted their innovative responses and made them more relevant with activities such as Gap Filler and Greening the Rubble. All this has been done with energy, commitment, creativity and good humour. Flat Man and his Flatmobile have brought a smile to many faces.

Three conceptual frameworks – citizenship vocabularies, participatory capital and views of citizenship – provide tools for analysing civic engage-

ment and assessing the implications for citizenship education. The concept of citizenship vocabularies assists us, as educators, to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to envision a wide range of civic and political possibilities. Participatory capital reminds us to provide the citizenship skills and contextual understandings that can turn the possibilities into action.

Examining the young people's actions in light of traditional views of citizenship demonstrates that our role is to enable young people to frame new conceptualizations that will harness their insights, encourage their initiative, and give them the opportunity to shape a new world – one that might have a better chance of solving some of the world's "wicked problems" (Rittel & Webber, 1973). The young people who mobilised in a time of need and rewrote the rulebook of collaborative disaster response have shown us that anything is possible.

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