

Engaging young citizens: Civic education practices in the classroom and beyond

A thriving democracy relies on the knowledge, skills and engagement of its citizens. Empowering children and helping them to develop the skills and agency they need to participate meaningfully in society is part of the mission of education systems in OECD countries (OECD, 2017^[1]). Civic knowledge and citizenship skills can be developed effectively at school, in the classroom, but also through multidisciplinary, experience-based programmes that reach beyond the school walls, placing students at the centre of the learning process.

This Policy Perspective draws on evidence from several OECD publications and beyond to explore and highlight select examples of successful child-centred civic learning practices which strengthen the democratic skills, values and knowledge of students. Three key practice areas will be analysed:

- Community involvement programmes
- Participatory budgeting
- Media literacy initiatives

Community involvement programmes

Community involvement programmes for school students – otherwise known as service learning, or community service – are a form of experiential learning that takes place in the community as an integral part of the curriculum. Experiential learning programmes are commonly praised for allowing students to become active participants in the learning process, rather than solely the recipients of knowledge. Community involvement programmes aim to positively influence students by offering them opportunities for authentic learning in settings outside of the classroom, opportunities to discover new passions, to strengthen the relationship between schools and their communities, and to foster interpersonal skills, which are essential for active and engaged citizens (Furco, 2010^[2]).

A case example from Ontario, Canada

School students between the age of 14 and 18 years old in the province of Ontario, Canada are required to complete 40 hours of unpaid community involvement activity in order to obtain the requirements for their high school (upper secondary) diploma. The Ontario Ministry of Education established the requirement in 1999, with the aim to “encourage students to develop awareness and understanding of civic responsibility and of the role they can play and the contributions they can make in strengthening and supporting their communities” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1999^[3]). The programme set the precedent for further service-learning curricula throughout Canada, with the provinces of British Columbia and Newfoundland adapting versions of the Ontario policy into their school systems.

The Ontario service-learning requirement activities undertaken by students must benefit in some way their local community, and can take place in a variety of settings, such as local businesses, non-profit organisations and public sector institutions such as hospitals and schools. Each school is required to create an approved list of community activities, with input from the school councils in its jurisdiction, the Special Education Advisory Committee, and the school board’s insurer. Examples of approved community activities include fundraising, youth programmes, volunteer work with seniors, working for community events, and office work for non-profit organisations. If a student wishes to do an activity outside of the approved list, they must receive permission from the school director, who will deem the suitability of the activity. The person or organisation providing the activity must offer any necessary training, equipment and any other particular preparation that is required for the task. The school board is responsible for the administrative procedures related to the activity.

Students can complete one or multiple community involvement activities over the span of four years, as long as they complete forty hours in total. The school principal is responsible for determining whether the student has met the requirement, and will indicate so on their school transcript.

Few studies directly analyse the effectiveness of Ontario’s 40-hour community involvement requirement. In their study of the programme, Farahmandpour et al. (2011^[4]) recommend to schools that students should be encouraged to reflect on their community involvement experiences in order to strengthen their learning outcomes; these are usually non-academic goals such as knowledge of social issues, the development of interests, and interpersonal skills. In their study of the political and social dimensions of compulsory community service, Henderson et al. (2012^[5]) indicate that the quality of community involvement is essential to the success of the programme and recommend therefore that focus should be placed on finding meaningful community involvement placements.

As stated by the Ontario Ministry of Education (1999^[3]), one of the goals of the programme is to strengthen civic values. The latest data comparing Ontario volunteer patterns to the rest of Canada found that youth in Ontario volunteer at a higher rate and have higher rates of participation in cultural and community-related activities than the rest of the population (Imagine Canada, 2010^[6]). In Canada’s 2018 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating (GSS-GVP), it was found that 62% of Ontario youth between 15 and 24 years old reported that they had volunteered at least once during the last year, and 72% had made a charitable donation (Tara Hahmann, 2021^[7]). Youth voter turnout for general (federal) elections increased in all Canadian provinces and territories between 2011 and 2015. In Ontario, it rose from 32.8% to 56.2% (Elections Canada, 2015^[8]).

What does the research say?

Overall, research on academic service-learning programmes suggest that it can enhance students’ academic, civic, personal, social, ethical and career-development skills (Furco, 2010^[2]). Studies focused on civic education outcomes found that participating in service-learning/community-based education can enhance students’ political knowledge (Hamilton and Zeldin, 1987^[9]), their political engagement (Morgan and Streb, 2001^[10]), and their motivation to volunteer in the future (Hamilton and Fenzel, 1988^[11]). Kahne

and Spote (2008^[12]) identified in their study that experience-based civic education was sizeably the most effective measure in increasing commitment to civic activities later in life, such as voting, volunteering and community work.

In a longitudinal study, Hart et al. (2007^[13]) found that both voluntary and required community service undertaken in upper secondary school were strong predictors of adult voting and volunteering patterns. Hart et al. (2007^[13]) also identified, however, that the quality of the volunteering experience is important for fostering long-term civic skills and participation. Involvement in extracurricular activities was also found to be predictive of voting and volunteering patterns later in life. Hart et al. (2007^[13]) identify a variety of reasons for service learning's success:

- Drawing from work by (Youniss and Yates, 1997^[14]), they identify that by performing a service, students have the chance to become personally involved with political and community issues, rather than thinking about them abstractly.
- Drawing from (Crystal and DeBell, 2002^[15]), they highlight that undertaking community involvement activities can allow students to build a network of people with whom they can talk about civic issues.
- Furthermore, community service activities may allow students to learn about social issues of which they previously had no knowledge (Eyler and Jr, 1999^[16]).
- Participating in community activities allows students to build civic skills, such as listening, teamwork and self-organisation, which may allow them to see themselves as more capable volunteers and citizens in the future (Hart et al., 2007^[13]).

Henderson et al. (2012^[5]) found similarly in their study that volunteering in high school had a positive impact on students' political knowledge, interest, and involvement. However, they also identified that a positive volunteering experience as evaluated by the student is crucial to a service-learning programme's success.

In sum

Community involvement programmes, such as that of Ontario, show success in developing students' civic knowledge and skills while also empowering children by placing them as active citizens within the community. While helping to develop students' professional and personal skills, they can also strengthen the relationship between the school and the community. Research on community involvement programmes overall yields positive results, however, policy makers should be aware that high-quality volunteering experiences and combining the experience with reflective learning practices are paramount to success.

Participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a process that allows members of the community to be directly involved in deciding how to spend a particular part of a public budget. This democratic process allows for a horizontal discussion among citizens and decision makers, rather than a vertical one with the decision makers at the top and the citizens at the bottom. The idea of participatory budgeting was founded in Brazil in 1989 and has since been applied in democracies throughout the world.

When applied to young people and schools, participatory budgeting has the potential to yield positive effects for the local area, but in particular for students, it can allow them to develop leadership skills, understand democratic processes, use their voices and enhance their sense of belonging within the school and wider community (Crum et al., 2020^[18]). Many schools around the world are now using participatory budgeting as a tool to encourage students to develop life skills, citizenship and an understanding of democracy. This section will provide examples of youth participatory budgeting schemes from France, Scotland and Portugal and an overview of their successes.

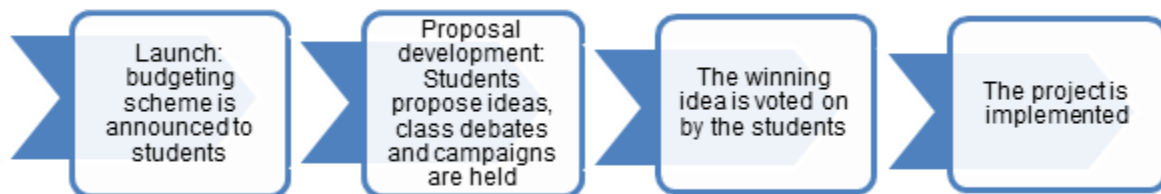
Schools Participatory Budgeting Programme, Portugal

Portugal was the first country in the world to run a participatory budgeting programme at the national level. The Portuguese Secretary of State described participatory budgeting as a way to reinforce democracy and the trust between citizens and public institutions (Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, 2017^[19]). As a component of the Portuguese National Strategy for Citizenship Education in Public Schools, the Portuguese Education Ministry introduced the Schools Participatory Budgeting programme (*Orçamento participativo das escolas* in Portuguese) nationally in 2016/17. The initiative was introduced with three key goals:

- To promote democratic values, processes and skills.
- To develop a sense of belonging for students in school and within the community, as well as a sense of responsibility and well-being.
- To allow students to develop financial literacy and entrepreneurship skills.

As part of the programme, each public school in Portugal is allocated a supplementary budget by the state, which is calculated according to the number of pupils in the school. The budget may be complemented by the school's own funds, or by other community funding. Thereafter, students are given the power to decide, through democratic processes, how the budget should be allocated. Students are required to develop budget proposals, debate, campaign for their ideas and vote based on their preferences. To encourage the feeling of belonging, and to root the school in the community, the proposals must benefit school services, or be used for equipment or educational activities that have a value for the whole school or community. Proposals need to have at least 5% of student endorsement to be eligible for voting, and the proposal with the most votes is selected and implemented. Figure 1 illustrates this process.

Figure 1. Portugal's Schools Participatory Budgeting Programme process



Source: Author's interpretation

The programme should take place over the course of a few months. It is suggested that the programme should commence with a launch event in the school, which should provide students with information about the scheme and the budget details, along with its possibilities and limitations. The second phase is proposal development, which involves idea generation, debates in the classroom, and the writing and submission of proposals by students. In the third stage, the school must hold a vote. An 'election commission' consisting of a group of students is assigned, campaigns and debates are held, and the vote itself takes place. Finally, the school is obliged to implement the winning project to the best of its ability, with continued input and participation from the pupils.

Portugal's Schools Participatory Budget (SPB) acknowledges young people's right to be involved in community life and the need to further develop skills, trust and participation in democratic institutions. It addresses several key areas of civic education: democratic values; skills and practices; and sense of

belonging in the community, including responsibility and financial literacy and entrepreneurship. The programme in Portugal has been well implemented by schools and students, and has shown success in engaging students' interest and stimulating valuable ideas. Since the launch of this initiative:

- 95% of schools implemented the Schools Participatory Budget
- 80% of proposals were considered acceptable by schools
- 91% of schools democratically elected students' proposals

Proposals put forward by the students focused mostly on the acquisition of equipment and improvement of leisure and sociability spaces for students within schools (51%). Many proposals also focused on sports equipment (20%), improvement of school services (13%), educational resources (12%) and extracurricular activities (12%) (Abrantes et al., 2019_[20]).

82% of principals surveyed considered that “SPB contributed to the awareness and civic education of many students” and 69% stated that “SPB meant an effective improvement on students' rights and participation in school life” (Abrantes et al., 2019_[20]).

Youth-led participatory budgeting in North Ayrshire, Scotland

Youth-led participatory budgeting (PB) has become a well-established and successful practice in the North Ayrshire region of Scotland (Cook, 2021_[21]). The North Ayrshire Council, covering six localities, applies a variety of youth-led participatory budgeting initiatives for children from the age of eight years and above. The self-proclaimed “child-centred” council has numerous initiatives such as the Youth PB Process, which places youth between 8-25 years in charge of a budget dedicated to youth-based community activities, as well as inviting youth to take part in wider community budget decisions. Youth are involved in every step of the process, such as designing the application forms, promoting the participatory budget on social media, and taking part in council discussions (Cook, 2021_[21]).

Each locality has a youth forum for young people between 11–20 years old. In addition, there is a North Ayrshire executive youth council committee made up of local representatives, and the Scottish Youth Parliament.

Engaging young people: Online and in schools

To engage with young people, North Ayrshire's brand “Shaping North Ayrshire: You get to decide what happens on your doorstep” publicises its information on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Discord in order to engage with a variety of age groups. In primary schools, a course called “What is PB?” has been introduced, in order to ensure that children understand and get used to the concept of participatory budgeting and the benefits of participating in such democratic processes. Since the introduction of these techniques, young people in North Ayrshire have become more likely to engage in participatory budgeting schemes (Cook, 2021_[21]).

Youth PB schemes in North Ayrshire have moved entirely online since the outbreak of COVID-19. North Ayrshire's nine secondary schools are receiving a record of between 6 500–7 000 votes per PB process through a virtual voting system. Votes are collected on the dedicated Young Scot platform and with the service Menti-meter. The head of the North Ayrshire Council Youth Work division would like to see participatory budgeting systems introduced into all schools as part of civic and democracy education (Cook, 2021_[21]).

Participatory budgeting in schools in Paris, France

In 2014, the Paris Municipality created a participatory budget scheme for its citizens. The residents of Paris were given power over 5% of the city budget, where they were encouraged to put forward and vote for proposals which benefit their local community. The experiment showed vast success in terms of social inclusion, a renewal of political knowledge amongst the population and the strengthening of political engagement (Peyraube, 2018^[22]). Thereafter, in 2016 the Department for Local Democracy, Associations and Youth created a specific participatory budget for schools in Paris, with the goal of teaching children about democracy and citizenship.

The Schools' Participatory Budget (*Le budget participatif des écoles* in French) enables children to choose a project for their school, funded by a government allocation. Since it began in 2016, 85% of Parisian schools representing over 66 000 children have participated in the democratic process. The programme is co-constructed among the Ministry of National Education (*Ministère de l'Éducation nationale*), the Department of School Affairs (*Direction des Affaires Scolaires – DASCO*) and the Academy of Paris (*Académie de Paris*). Teachers and administrative staff were also consulted in the creation of the programme.

Each year, the Department for School Affairs (*Direction des Affaires Scolaires*) publishes a catalogue of potential projects for students to vote on. The projects proposed by DASCO are designed to be relevant to current societal issues in order to encourage children to think about their community and how they can improve it. The projects proposals put forward by DASCO in 2022 were divided into four themes: climate action, creating community, digital technology and planning for the Olympic Games in 2024 (Académie de Paris, 2022^[23]).

For example, in the climate action category, schools can choose from options such as a “Climate Ambassadors Programme” where they could be provided with equipment for recording podcasts and a budget for creating campaigns; or creating a functional vegetable garden on the school premises, with additional sustainable aspects such as beehives, for instance (Académie de Paris, 2022^[23]).

During the years 2019–2020, 100 out of 114 middle schools and 325 of the 355 elementary schools took part in the participatory budget scheme in Paris. In total, 300 new projects were created in Parisian schools, with a total budget of EUR 7.8 million and EUR 13.8 million being spent respectively (Mairie de Paris, 2020^[24]).

Further research on participatory budgeting

The literature surrounding school participatory budgeting schemes is, in general, extremely positive. In an empirical study of PB in the United States, teachers observed that it engaged students who don't normally participate in classroom activities, and that this may be because students find it fun, meaningful and refreshing (Crum et al., 2020^[18]). Participatory budgeting develops several competencies which are considered important by researchers for building capable and contributing members of society. These are competencies such as self-efficacy, critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity (Golinkoff and Hirsh-Pasek, 2016^[24]). In their study of PB in Chicago high schools in 2019, Crum et al. (2020, p. 11^[18]) identified the following findings:

- Teachers reported that their students used critical thinking and interdisciplinary skills, and seemed highly engaged in the process.
- Students reported that they felt like their opinions mattered in the PB process.
- The majority of students who responded to their survey identified that collaboration and communication were the two most important skills they learned in the process.
- Students indicated that after the PB experience, they felt they had an increased understanding of how to use the skills they learned in the real world.

In sum

Participatory budgeting is a democratic process through which citizens are invited to make decisions and find solutions regarding matters that directly affect them. Applied to schools, participatory budgeting gives students the opportunity to gain an understanding of democratic procedures, to foster a sense of belonging in the community and to develop interpersonal skills, which can empower them to effectively take part in civic life both in the present and in the future.

Media literacy initiatives

Digital technologies play a central role in children’s lives, and international trends suggest they are spending increasing amounts of time in digital environments. Across the world, education systems are placing an increasing emphasis on the concept of ‘digital citizenship’, which refers to the norms of behaviour regarding the use of digital technologies (Burns and Gottschalk, 2020^[26]). Digital citizenship includes technical ability, in addition to the skills needed to actively, responsibly and positively engage in digital communities (Richardson and Milovidov, 2019^[26]).

Well-informed citizens are essential for reinforcing trust in public institutions and preserving democratic values (Suarez-Alvarez, 2021^[28]). While the digital environment offers opportunities that can enrich children’s lives in a variety of ways, children who use the internet also face risks such as being exposed to false and misleading digital content that can deepen political polarisation and erode public trust in democratic institutions (Hill, 2022^[29]). School students’ proficiency in distinguishing facts and opinions, and detecting biased information and malicious content varies greatly between countries and socio-economic factors (Suarez-Alvarez, 2021^[28]). Digital media literacy education in schools can help close these gaps and foster proficient readers in a digital world.

Social media as a source of information

Social media platforms represent a significant portion of online media consumption today, and are particularly vulnerable to the spread of misinformation (Pennycook and Rand, 2019^[30]). The algorithms on which social media operate are designed to channel similar posts and like-minded people together. This can create an “echo chamber” effect, which can reinforce thoughts and opinions, and can fuel a confirmation bias (Suarez-Alvarez, 2021^[28]).

Data from UNESCO (2021^[31]) show that young people rely more on online platforms than on traditional sources for news and information. However, the report also finds that young people between 15–24 years old do not trust social media as an information source in general, with just 17% reporting that they trust information on these platforms “a lot” (UNICEF, 2021^[31]). A recent study from OFCOM in the United Kingdom (2022^[32]) found that six out of ten 12–18 year olds reported using social media for news, even though they reported it was the least-trusted or accurate news source. In contrast, the 12–15 year olds who responded to the survey preferred to trust their family (68%) or the TV (65%) (OFCEM, 2022^[32]). Across OECD countries, only 32% of children firmly believe that the internet is a reliable source of information (OECD, 2021^[33]).

Effective media literacy education practices at school

The European Union (EU) Media Literacy Expert Group (MLEG) identifies “media literacy” as an umbrella concept that “includes all technical, cognitive, social, civic and creative capacities that allow a citizen to

access, have a critical understanding of the media and interact with it” (Media Literacy Expert Group, 2011^[34]). Media literacy is gaining increasing political attention internationally. For example, it is included in the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) created by the EU, which calls for greater co-operation at European level on digital education. In 2022, UNESCO released the Global Standards for Media and Information Literacy Curricula Development Guidelines (2022^[35]), which include extensive guidelines for pedagogical approaches, policy implications and impact, engagement with stakeholders, and implementation strategies that schools can adopt.

Incorporating digital media literacy into teaching and learning can help children learn how to distinguish fact from opinion, assess the credibility of information sources, and detect biased or false information (Hill, 2022^[29]). Teaching media literacy at school level can be integrated into many curriculum subjects, including history, geography, civics and science (McDougall et al., 2018^[36]). Government-supported media literacy initiatives often take the form of courses in secondary school media studies, such as the United Kingdom’s General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) Media Course, or as a curriculum policy, such as the addition of media literacy strands to Ontario’s English curriculum (Dezuanni, 2016^[37]).

Media and information literacy in Finland

In Finland, media and information literacy (MIL) is seen as an important element of civic competence, that contributes to the capability of people and communities to “live a good, meaningful life” (Salomaa and Palsa, 2019, p. 9^[38]). Media Education (*mediakasvatus* in Finnish) refers to the educational actions that promote MIL and the skills and competencies related to it (KAVI, 2019^[39]). In 2019, the Ministry of Education and Culture updated their national media education policy, building on policy guidelines for media literacy established in 2013. The refreshed policy guidelines respond to changes in media culture and, in support of lifelong learning, include media education recommendations for all Finnish people and age groups.

Finland’s media education is part of the National Curriculum, and takes a multidisciplinary approach by including media education across different activities and actors such as teachers, museums workers and librarians. The policy has three core objectives:

- To provide comprehensive media education. That is, media education which covers all different aspects of content, different perspectives, and reaches all the different target groups and geographic locations.
- To provide high-quality media education. That is, developing a research-based curriculum, that is meaningful and non-discriminatory, with clear competencies outlined.
- To provide systematic and consistent media education. This includes a financial plan that ensures that media education is attributed with income, and area disparities are taken into account.

Finland also has a dedicated Media Education network called the National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI). They, together with the Department for Media Education (MEKU), are responsible for promoting media education, children’s media competencies and skills, and contribute to the development of a safe media environment for children (KAVI, 2019^[39]). In addition, several governmental bodies support the policy, including the Ministry of Justice (which approaches MIL from the viewpoint of inclusion and democratic education), and the Finnish Competition and Consumer Agency, which considers the perspective of consumer education and awareness. Outside of formal education, there are collaborations with organisations such as the Finnish Library Association, as well as child and youth organisations, that aim to promote MIL in informal settings.

Some criticisms of Finland’s Media Education policy include that there are certain barriers in promoting the concept of media literacy amongst education professionals and policy makers. Kumpulainen (2019, p. 2^[39]) identifies in their research of Finland’s Media Education policy that the inclusion of multiliteracy (including media literacy) in curriculum texts is not enough on its own, and requires professional development

opportunities for teachers. Further, they identify that it is challenging to add new de-contextualised skills into the curriculum.

Digital media literacy in Ireland

In 2016, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in Ireland introduced a Digital Media Literacy short course for the “Junior Cycle” of schooling, representing the first three years of secondary school. It is not mandatory for schools, but highly recommended. The short course addresses digital skills, creativity and communication, as well as critical thinking skills and online safety. The aim of the course is to support students’ learning, development and capacity to “participate effectively in social and community life.” (NCCA, 2016, p. 5_[41]). The Digital Media Literacy course is split into four key strands:

1. My digital world. In this strand, students explore how and why digital technologies are used, investigate legal and ethical issues surrounding downloading media online, and develop an understanding of online safety for themselves and others.
2. Following my interests online. Students explore how digital media is published and their various purposes, compare how similar information is presented in different contexts, and explore how to represent information using digital imagery.
3. Checking the facts. Students investigate how the choice of digital media influences and impacts consumer patterns and explore the notion of bias and information online.
4. Publishing myself. In this strand, students are invited to investigate online rights and risks, demonstrate good standards and protocols for online sharing, and learn how to cite and reference accurately.

There are a variety of classroom-based activities relating to the outlined learning goals of the short course. Teachers are invited to integrate them into students’ learning process in any order that suits them, undertaking around 100 hours of classroom work over the course of three years. Some examples of learning activities are outlined in [Table 1](#) below.

Table 1. Digital media literacy learning activities

Links between junior cycle digital media literacy and the statements of learning

Statement	Examples of related learning in the course
The student uses technology and digital media tools to learn, communicate, work and think collaboratively and creatively in a responsible and ethical manner.	Students work in teams to produce digital content on topics that are relevant to their lives.
The student creates, appreciates and critically interprets a wide range of texts.	Students find, critically appraise and use digital content. They will learn to navigate and make judgements about the quality and reliability of digital content.
The student communicates effectively using a variety of means in a range of contexts.	Students share, present and publish their stories, ideas and opinions in a personal and creative way using digital technology.

Source: (NCCA, 2016, p. 6_[41])

The course recommends alternative assessments that are active and diverse in nature in order to support the students’ learning process. Examples of classroom-based assessment related to the course include:

- Creating a school website page with details of the school’s digital media conduct code. It can include a variety of media sources, such as infographics and videos, which present details on appropriate online behaviour.

10 | No. 65 – Engaging young citizens: civic education practices in the classroom and beyond

- Producing and conducting a survey on the adults in the school community and their attitudes towards the use of social media. The results of the survey should be published in an appropriate way (correct references, following code of conduct regarding anonymity), and presented using a variety of digital media formats such as visuals and graphics.

These types of assessment support the students' learning process through active participation, and by offering them ways to deepen their knowledge of digital media use. Research has found that providing an alternative to standard tests and exams goes beyond assessing acquired knowledge and provides instead a reflection of the students' learnt competences (Ryerson University, n.d.^[42]).

Overall, the response of student teachers who have been introduced to the media literacy education policy in Ireland has been positive, and figures show that they are increasingly introducing it in their classrooms (Castellini da Silva, 2022^[43]). However, Castellini da Silva (2022^[43]) explains that throughout Ireland there is still a lack of teacher training in the field of media education, which could mean that media literacy is not being adequately addressed at school as teachers may lack the required skills, knowledge and confidence. There are not currently any figures regarding the number of school students in Ireland who receive media literacy education.

Overall, research shows that education in media literacy can have positive outcomes on students' knowledge, skills and attitudes in analysing and critically understanding the media and disinformation (McDougall et al., 2018^[36]).

Further media literacy education strategies in Ireland

In January 2022, the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media in Ireland published an Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill, with the overarching goal of reducing harmful content in the digital environment. The bill led to the creation of a Media Commission, which is responsible for updating online media regulations. However, it is also responsible for the protection of children, research, education and media literacy, with the aim of fostering an open and trusted online environment (Media Literacy Ireland, 2022^[44]).

In addition, there is an informal media literacy education alliance called Media Literacy Ireland, which is a collaboration of organisations and individuals who work together on a voluntary basis to promote media literacy in Ireland. Their priorities are to co-ordinate stakeholders in media literacy, both nationally and internationally, offering support and advice; to inspire and facilitate the development of new MIL policies; to communicate about MIL to key stakeholders and foster discussion; and to promote MIL through public awareness campaigns, such as the Be Media Smart campaign, aimed at both children and adults (Be Media Smart, 2022^[45]).

Further research and areas for improvement

In their review of effective media literacy practices in primary and secondary schools, McDougall et al. (2018^[36]) identified that school-based media literacy initiatives have been shown to be effective in reducing the vulnerability of children to disinformation. Evidence from their study showed that students who reported high levels of media literacy learning opportunities were more able to identify misinformation. They also found that classroom-based teaching methods for media literacy are successful when using active-learning methods, such as discussion-based learning, collaborative projects and games-based learning.

Interestingly, McDougall et al. (2018^[36]) additionally found that successful implementations of media literacy education at school treated the classroom environment as an extended 'third space', where teachers, students and other actors worked in partnership to co-create learning.

In their OECD working paper regarding policy responses to media literacy, Hill (2022, p. 61^[29]) identifies a number of limitations and gaps in the current literature available on media literacy education.

1. There are few tools available to measure the media literacy of teachers. While some tools are available, the extent to which they target media literacy is limited. For example, the European Commission's [SELFIEforTEACHERS](#) resource is a digital tool that helps primary and secondary school teachers reflect on how they are using digital technologies in their professional practice. However, it focuses mostly on teachers' digital competencies rather than media literacy.
2. There is a paucity of research available on the professional development and training of teachers in the area of media literacy.
3. There is a limited scope of research available on the effectiveness of media literacy programmes in the classroom.

In sum

The importance of media literacy in today's digital world should be carefully considered in civic education policies and practices. While increasing digital access offers children numerous opportunities to enrich their lives, they also risk being exposed to false and misleading information, which can contribute to political polarisation and an erosion in trust in public institutions (Hill, 2022^[29]). Media literacy programmes, campaigns and policies, for schools and beyond, can be effective in empowering children to effectively navigate the digital environment and distinguish fact from fiction.

The bottom line:

Many OECD countries have implemented programmes and policies specifically targeting the development of civic skills and values in schools. Some of the most successful practices steer away from knowledge-transfer-based learning, and towards experiential learning practices which empower children by placing them in the centre of the learning process. The benefits of experience-based learning programmes also have the potential to reach beyond the classroom walls, allowing schools and students to create and strengthen relationships with the communities around them.

21st Century Children

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21st Century Children looks at the nature of modern childhood and the ways in which schools and communities can work together to protect and guide children while still allowing them the flexibility to make their own mistakes.

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Further reading: Burns, T. and F. Gottschalk (eds.) (2020), *Education in the Digital Age: Healthy and Happy Children*, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1209166a-en>.

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14 | No. 65 – Engaging young citizens: civic education practices in the classroom and beyond

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