

"Education for Active Citizenship"

Susan Pascoe

This paper has been prepared for a short workshop at the 50th Anniversary of Australian Citizenship Conference at Melbourne University in July 1999. Co-presenters Susan Pascoe (Civics Education Group) and Sue Ferguson (Curriculum Corporation) will outline recent Australian initiatives to reestablish Civics and Citizenship Education in primary and secondary schools.

"Democracy is a system based on trust in human responsibility. This responsibility, however, must be constantly nurtured and cultivated. The State should not believe that it alone knows better than others what society needs. It should trust its citizens and enable them to share in a substantive way the exercise of responsibility for the condition of the society."

(Vaclav Havel, 1995)

If Australians are to have a capacity for active citizenship then schools have a vital role to play. While parents are the primary educators of their children they share with schools a responsibility to nurture the moral and ethical development of young people and their capacity to live in community.

Youth culture, formal legal and political structures, community groups and the mass media add to the pot pourri from which we expect young people to emerge as informed, responsible and active citizens. This paper argues that schools have a special role to play in the development of a civic capacity in young people, that this role was largely neglected in Australia for about a 30-year period from the mid 60s and that a massive national effort is underway to rectify the situation. We will identify some of the issues surrounding education for active citizenship and "show and tell" some of the innovative approaches currently being developed for Australian students.

Schools and Civic Life

Australia's Common and Agreed Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first century open with the preamble, 'Australia's future depends upon each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just and open society'. The Goals articulate the knowledge, skills, values and attributes young people should gain through schooling. They attempt to reconcile the aspirations of society with the needs of individuals. (See Attachment 1).

Similarly it is argued in forums conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) that we can summarise the multiple purposes of schooling into three broad categories: the development of individual potential; the production of a future labour force and cultural transmission from one generation to the next (OECD, 1993). It would be contrived to separate these elements in a discussion on

education for active citizenship. Many of the skills for adult involvement in family, community and work domains are generic and can be acquired within and beyond schools.

The American philosopher Amy Gutman describes school education as "conscious social reproduction". She argues that "public education plays a critical role in democracy by teaching non-repression and non-discrimination and imparting the values and confidence necessary for civic participation." (Gutman 1987). Some of these learnings happen at the bus stop and on the sports field but they are not left to serendipity. They are embedded in curriculum areas such as Health and Physical Education where students discover the importance of mutual respect and the observance of rules if they are to learn together. They are explicit in pastoral care programs and Studies of Society and the Environment where opportunities exist to learn about other cultures and ways of seeing and to celebrate our commonality and difference.

Curriculum documents cannot take carriage of the responsibility for citizenship education. A school's ethos, its structures and its role models also speak to students about what is important and valued. Despite the paucity of formal teaching in civics education in recent years schools have tackled issues such as inclusivity and generic competence that underpin civic engagement.

In an heroic address on public education in Australia a senior educator, Dr Ken Boston, described the critical role of schools in Australian democratic life.

"Throughout successive waves of immigration dating back to the last century, Australia's public schools, together with Catholic parish schools, have been without doubt the most important factor in shaping the pluralist, democratic, multicultural nation which Australia is today.

Our teachers have done more - so much more than any other agency in the community to teach young people to live together harmoniously, to respect each others ways and values, to avoid conflict and to resolve it peacefully should it occur.

They have created and sustained the amalgam of nationhood, by laying the robust foundation of knowledge, skill and understanding on which the cultural, social and economic life of this country has been built".

(1987, page 2)

Episodic Civics and Citizenship Education

While our parents were exposed to a solid civics program that lauded God, King and Country, many of the 'flower power' generation missed out. It is a recent phenomenon that Civics and Citizenship education is a priority in State and Territory education systems in Australia. The research undertaken by Julian Thomas for the Civics Expert Group in 1994 illustrated that for roughly a 30-year period from the mid-60's to the mid-90's there was little systematic, coordinated Civics and Citizenship education in Australian schools.

Thomas' research confirmed the position put to two Senate enquiries in 1989 and 1991 that there was a gap between the rhetoric and the reality of the provision of Civics and Citizenship education in Australian schools (Pascoe 1996). The approaching Centenary Federation has provided an impetus for community discussion both on the significance of the event and the capacity of Australians to meaningfully celebrate it. The Centenary Federation Advisory Committee argued that "ignorance of Australian History and our Constitution is seen as the greatest obstacle to meaningful celebration of the Centenary of Federation" (1994, 12). Similarly the Republic Advisory Committee argued that Australians needed more opportunity to understand the basic principles of Government:

"The Committee believes that those entrusted with primary and secondary education, in particular, should consider the introduction or extension of appropriate courses in the fields of Civics and Government" (1994,20).

This was the climate in which the Civics Expert Group appointed by the then Prime Minister, Paul Keating, undertook its deliberations. The critique of inadequate provision in Civics and Citizenship education was replicated time and again in written submissions and in hearings around the country. The group included findings from a national civics survey conducted by the Australian National Opinion Poll (ANOP) in its report, 'Whereas the People

Findings such as only 18 per cent of Australians knowing the contents of the Constitution and only 40 per cent being able to correctly recall the names of both Houses of Parliament provided fertile material for the media.

Based on these findings, earlier enquiries and its own deliberations, the Civics Expert Group found overwhelming evidence of inadequate teaching of Civics and Citizenship education in Australia over about a thirty year period. Happily this was accompanied by a strong community sentiment that something should be done about it and the bipartisan and political will to make it happen.

Whereas the People.....(1994-1996)

The Civics Experts Group was aware of a concern amongst some Coalition members that its work could be a Trojan horse for the Labor Government to introduce Republicanism. It was constantly reminded by States and Territories of their Constitutional responsibility for education and the existing pressures of crowded curriculum in schools. The group decided to use the Ten Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia (AEC 1989) as the platform on which a Civics and Citizenship Program could be built. Goal 7 endorsed the teaching of Citizenship:

"To develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which will enable students to participate as active and informed citizens in our democratic Australian society within an international context" (AEC 1999).

The Group recognised the pressures on schools to accommodate more and more programs to address social issues. However it asserted the primacy of Civics and Citizenship education:

"We put the view that education for Citizenship ranks with English and Mathematics as a priority for school education, and that is an essential component for liberal education" (1994,57).

Rather than create a new learning area and hence overlay additional expectations on schools, the group argued that Civics and Citizenship education could be embedded into the existing curriculum for the Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE). This was a strategic minimalist decision to facilitate the explicit integration of Civics and Citizenship in school curricula. In effect, other areas of the curriculum such as English, Health and Physical Education and the Arts lend themselves to the teaching of Civics and Citizenship education, however a task of this scale was more likely to encounter obstacles along the way.

The Civics Expert Group determined from the outset that its approach would integrate Civics and Citizenship education. It was aware of the evidence that Civics education programs which focused on knowledge transmission alone had limited effect (Thomas 1994; Torney-Purta and Schwille, 1986).

"It is important that the new Civics education proposals avoid the weaknesses that beset previous Civics education courses – a narrow perspective, unimaginative presentation that passed over the heads of many for whom it was provided, a failure to connect formal subject matter to everyday concerns or grand rhetoric to actual outcomes –and worse still, a failure of nerve that left Civics as a lifeless imposition on unwilling students.

(Civics Expert Group 1994, 8).

It argued that Australian cultural diversity ought rest on the ethics of tolerance and the equal civic worth of every citizen and on a broad knowledge base encompassing local and international perspectives. It argued that Citizenship education in the Australian Federal context should be cooperative and non partisan.

"It should provide an awareness of how such vital issues as protection of the environment raise issues of sovereignty. It should stimulate awareness of our place in the world and help them to appreciate the issues that arise from our international responsibilities and it should assist them to act as informed, confident, tolerant citizens secure in their rights and their responsibilities as members of a diverse and inclusive society. (1994, 28).

The Keating Government accepted the key recommendations from the Civics Expert Group and committed a budget of some \$25m for the professional development of teachers and the writing of curriculum materials for students. It also committed part of

this budget to a broad community awareness programme. The Curriculum Corporation was engaged to begin work on the Curriculum materials. The Civics Expert Group retained a role overseeing the implementation of its recommendations.

Discovering Democracy (1997 –

With the election of a Federal Coalition Government in March 1996 the work of the Civics Expert Group was temporarily halted while the Government considered its position. Significantly the Coalition election policy had been critical of the Labor Government for not pursuing the recommendations of the Civics Expert Group with sufficient vigour. The then Minister for Schools, the Hon Dr David Kemp took a personal interest in Civics and Citizenship Education, however it still took some twelve months for Cabinet to determine its preferred directions.

The most significant change was an expansion of the original Civics Expert Group of three members (Professor Stuart McIntyre, (Chair), Dr Ken Boston and Susan Pascoe to include Dr John Hirst (new Chair) and Professor Greg Craven). The Group was renamed the Civics Education Group and it was given explicit oversight for the development of Curriculum Materials for students in the years 4 to 10. Rather than the broad area of Studies and the Environment taking carriage of Civics and Citizenship education, the Coalition Government decided that it was more appropriate for the discipline of history to be used. This decision met surprisingly little opposition within the social education community. The revised approach was renamed "Discovering Democracy" and was announced by Dr David Kemp in May 1997. The Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) endorsed the program a month later at its June meeting.

The Program includes the development of CD Roms, Kits for Primary and Secondary schools, reference books for teachers and access to the Discovering Democracy homepage. It is closely linked to the professional development activities for teachers and cognisant of developments in assessment for Civics and Citizenship education. The aims, the intended learning outcomes and the values and attitudes associated with the Discovering Democracy Program are listed in Attachment 2. It is significant that the approach combines an emphasis on knowledge and understanding with capacities to engage in and evaluate aspects of democratic life. Values such as concern for the welfare, rights and dignity of all people combine with aspirations to develop personal character traits such as empathy, respect for the law and critical mindedness.

Issues in Establishing Effective Citizenship Education Programs

An effective Civics and Citizenship education program assumes that students are literate and numerate and that they have generic skills which they can apply in work, family and community situations. The Mayer Committees 1992 set of 7 key competencies is a set of generic capacities such as planning and organising activities, working with others and in teams and collecting, analysing and organising information. Arguably these competencies are necessary for individuals who wish to engage in individual or collective action as citizens or workers. One of the difficulties with the current structure of schools is that

they move to discipline specific timetabling in the secondary school and it is more difficult for schools to ensure that these generic competencies are acquired by students.

A further issue is the disposition and the capacity of teachers to implement Civics and Citizenship education in schools. Recent research (Gilbert et al, 1995 and Print and Craven, 1999) indicates that teachers assess themselves as having inadequate knowledge of Civics and Citizenship education programs and consequently many lack confidence in the area. In addition, there is evidence of some ambivalence from teachers who see it as their role to create critical thinkers rather than communicate the dominant hegemony to their pupils. Clearly the professional development activities organised through the States and Territories need to tackle these issues head on.

The issue of the crowded curriculum will also need to be addressed if teachers are to accept additional teachings into their crowded school day. States and Territories are integrating Civics and Citizenship education into their Studies of Society and the Environment with explicit syllabii provided in New South Wales. Opportunities will need to be provided for teachers to accommodate themselves with these changes and to learn how to use the materials produced for the teaching of Civics and Citizenship education in schools. The professional development program funded by the Commonwealth Government is a critical element in ensuring the effective implementation of the Discovering Democracy approach.

Developing the school materials

Curriculum Corporation was contracted by the Commonwealth to undertake the development of the school curriculum materials. The contract states clearly that the materials must gain acceptance by all education systems and sectors and that consultation with all stakeholders must be a feature of the development process.

Defining the stakeholders has been an interesting exercise. In the early days of the project it became clear that the usual list of education departments, teacher professional associations, education academics and parent groups was the tip of the iceberg. The Corporation had contact with a whole new group of people and organisations. These included non-government organisations such as the Red Cross and the Australian Conservation Foundation, academics from history and political science, community groups such as Rotary and the RSL. A whole host of individuals interested in ethics, values and in youth participation wanted to be involved. Church groups of all denominations submitted ideas for the content of the project.

All of these groups have had the opportunity to put their point of view and all positions were considered. Of course there was much conflicting advice and some decisions were made that did not please some groups.

There was dispute about the focus of the content of the materials. Were they to focus on the contemporary and the topic and on participation skills? Or were they to

focus on knowledge and principles and values. The approach adopted in the materials was a blend of both.

The pedagogy to be incorporated was also under dispute. The dominant ideology in the learning area is that of students learning process and that knowledge and understanding is of secondary importance. Again the approach adopted was both – an inquiry based pedagogy with a focus on students learning about the origins, principles, operations and values underpinning Australian democracy in an engaging and challenging fashion.

Materials development commenced in 1997. This was right at the beginning of the information technology boom in the school sector. Computers were starting to be talked about as reforming education, huge amounts of money was being poured into computer hardware and in linking schools to the Internet.

But it was early days. Only very small proportions of schools had reasonable access to communication technology and computer labs and were still the dominant feature of school environments. Email, web-browsers and chat sessions were things of the future. CD ROM technology was in the early days in areas other than games but we knew that the new digital curriculum was imminent.

Well it's still imminent but much closer than even we predicted at that time. We resolved that we would include digital material in the materials but our crystal ball was not clear enough to predict the velocity of the change in access. So some of the decisions we made were conservative. We were not conservative though in predicting how comfortable teachers would be with the new learning technologies and in many ways perhaps our conservatism in the use we made of digital learning environment was the right choice. We do ponder on occasions though what choices we would have made if we knew then what we know now.

The materials developed so far have been well received all over the country. There is still some concern expressed that the blend we chose was too far towards the knowledge, understanding end and too far away from the participation and active citizenship end. However it was and remains our view that active citizens need to be informed. That participation in democracy must be based on a firm understanding of the structure, operations and principles that underpin our system.

Conclusion

In a federal system with states asserting their constitutional responsibility for school education the national initiative to promote Civics and Citizenship Education in Australian schools required adroit management. This short paper has affirmed the role of schools in educating youth for civic engagement, it has noted the period in Australia when civic and citizenship education lapsed and described the efforts of recent governments to reinvigorate learning in the area. An inclusive, consultative approach has been taken to the materials development exercise to ensure that jurisdictions will endorse them and

teachers will use them. The 50th Anniversary of Australian Citizenship is an opportunity to celebrate the rich and pluralistic nature of Australian society and the contribution of schools to social cohesion.

Susan Pascoe and
Sue Ferguson
13 July, 1999
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Attachment 1

Australia's Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century

Preamble

Australia's future depends upon each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just and open society.

High quality schooling is central to achieving this vision.

This statement of national goals for schooling provides broad directions to guide schools and education authorities in securing these outcomes for students.

It acknowledges the capacity of all young people to learn, and the role of schooling in developing that capacity. It also acknowledges the role of parents as the first educators of their children and the central role of teachers in the learning process.

Schooling provides a foundation for young Australians' intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development. By providing a supportive and nurturing environment, schooling contributes to the development of students' sense of self-worth, enthusiasm for learning and optimism for the future.

Governments set the public policies that foster the pursuit of excellence, enable a diverse range of educational choices and aspirations, safeguard the entitlement of all young people to high quality schooling, promote the economic use of public resources, and uphold the contribution of schooling to a socially cohesive and culturally rich society.

Common and agreed goals for schooling establish a foundation for action among State and Territory governments with their constitutional responsibility for schooling, the Commonwealth, non-government school authorities and all those who seek the best possible educational outcomes for young Australians, to improve the quality of schooling nationally.

The achievement of these common and agreed national goals entails a commitment to collaboration for the purposes of:

further strengthening schools as learning communities where teachers, students and their families work in partnership with business, industry and the wider community;
enhancing the status and quality of the teaching profession;
continuing to develop curriculum and related systems of assessment, accreditation and credentialling that promote quality and are nationally recognised and valued;
increasing public confidence in school education through explicit and defensible standards that guide improvement in students' levels of educational achievement and through which the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of schooling can be measured and evaluated.
These national goals provide a basis for investment in schooling to enable all young people to engage effectively with an increasingly complex world. This world will be characterised by advances in information and communication technologies, population diversity arising from international mobility and migration, and complex environmental and social challenges.

The achievement of the national goals for schooling will assist young people to contribute to Australia's social, cultural and economic development in local and global contexts. Their achievement will also assist young people to develop a disposition towards learning throughout their lives so that they can exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens of Australia.

Goals

1. Schooling should develop fully the talents and capacities of all students. In particular, when students leave schools they should:
 - 1.1 have the capacity for, and skills in, analysis and problem solving and the ability to communicate ideas and information, to plan and organise activities and to collaborate with others;
 - 1.2 have qualities of self-confidence, optimism, high self-esteem, and a commitment to personal excellence as a basis for their potential life roles as family, community and workforce members;
 - 1.3 have the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice, and the capacity to make sense of their world, to think about how things got to be the way they are, to make rational and informed decisions about their own lives and to accept responsibility for their own actions;
 - 1.4 be active and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia's system of government and civic life;
 - 1.5 have employment related skills and an understanding of the work environment, career options and pathways as a foundation for, and positive attitudes towards, vocational education and training, further education, employment and life-long learning;
 - 1.6 be confident, creative and productive users of new technologies, particularly information and communication technologies, and understand the impact of those technologies on society;

- 1.7 have an understanding of, and concern for, stewardship of the natural environment, and the knowledge and skills to contribute to ecologically sustainable development;
- 1.8 have the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to establish and maintain a healthy lifestyle, and for the creative and satisfying use of leisure time.

2. In terms of curriculum, students should have:

2.1 attained high standards of knowledge, skills and understanding through a comprehensive and balanced curriculum in the compulsory years of schooling encompassing the agreed eight key learning areas:

the Arts

English

Health and Physical Education

Languages Other than English

Mathematics

Science

Studies of Society and Environment

Technology

and the interrelationships between them.

2.2 attained the skills of Numeracy and English Literacy; such that, every student should be numerate, able to read, write, spell and communicate at an appropriate level.

2.3 participated in programs of vocational learning during the compulsory years and have had access to vocational education and training programs as part of their senior secondary studies.

2.4 participated in programs and activities which foster and develop enterprise skills, including those skills which will allow them maximum flexibility and adaptability in the future.

3. Schooling should be socially just, so that:

3.1 students' outcomes from schooling are free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability; and of differences arising from students' socio-economic background or geographic location;

3.2 the learning outcomes of educationally disadvantaged students improve and, over time, match those of other students;

3.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students;

3.4 all students understand and acknowledge the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to Australian society and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians;

3.5 all students understand and acknowledge the value of cultural and linguistic diversity, and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, such diversity in the Australian community and internationally;

3.6 all students have access to the high quality education necessary to enable the completion of school education to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent and that provides clear and recognised pathways to employment and further education and training.

Appendix 2

Content and approaches

(Aim of civics and citizenship education

Civics and citizenship education aims to assist students to understand the relevance of political and legal systems to everyday life, and develop capacities to participate as informed, reflective and active citizens in their civic community.

The Discovering Democracy materials will provide opportunities for students to: gain knowledge and understanding of the origins and nature of Australia's democratic processes, government, judicial system and the nation's place in the international community;

understand how participation and decision-making operate in contemporary Australia and how the nation's civic life might change in the future;

develop personal character traits, such as respecting individual worth and human dignity, empathy, respect for the law, being informed about public issues, critical mindedness and willingness to express points of view, listen, negotiate and compromise;

understand how our system of government works in practice and how it affects citizens;

understand the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and the opportunities for exercising them.

(Intended learning outcomes

The materials will support progress towards outcomes specified in the nationally developed profile for Studies of society and environment and State and Territory outcomes frameworks.

The materials will be designed to provide learning experiences for students to enable them, by the end of the compulsory years of schooling, to:

identify major features of Australia's political and legal systems;

explain influences of Great Britain and the United States of America on Australia's political system;

describe principles of Australian democracy, tracing development from their origins to today;
identify values implicit in Australian democracy;
compare and contrast features of various democratic and non-democratic states from today and the past;
evaluate aspects of Australian democracy from a range of perspectives including those of women and indigenous people;
evaluate the impact on civic life of changes in Australia's population and economy;
analyse variations in the participation of different groups in Australian political life;
examine the role of political parties in Australia;
identify influences on policies of parties and governments;
evaluate media representations of political issues;
develop reasoned arguments for and against changes in Australia's political and legal systems;
evaluate examples of public policy in relation to the political, economic and social context of the time;
identify ways to participate in civic life and evaluate the participation of others;
identify how rights and obligations of Australian citizens relate to local national and global contexts.

Values and attitudes

Recognising that Australian society is both cohesive and pluralistic, democratic values will be supported through the project materials. Students will learn about the importance of principles such as:

democratic decision-making and popular sovereignty;
government accountability;
civility, truth-telling and respect for the law;
the value of individual and collective initiative and effort;
concern for the welfare, rights and dignity of all people.

The materials will support values such as tolerance, acceptance of cultural diversity, respect for others and freedom of speech, religion and association.

The project will also present opportunities for students to make informed decisions about issues of importance to themselves and others. While assisting teachers to promote broadly agreed democratic values, the Discovering Democracy materials will suggest ways that teachers can approach contested issues through disciplined inquiry and reflection. Students will be encouraged to formulate defensible stances as a component of developing citizenship skills necessary for effective participation in a democracy.

In addition, the materials will support students' practical engagement in organisations such as student representative councils in schools and voluntary associations in the wider community.