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A case for cautious optimism?
Active Citizenship and the Australian Civics and Citizenship Curriculum

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Abstract

In late 2013 a new curriculum for Civics and Citizenship education was published by the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority for use in Australian schools. In line with previous curricular initiatives concerning education for citizenship in Australia a key rationale behind the new subject is the education of "active citizens". Research evidence over the last twenty-five years paints a mixed picture regarding the extent to which the translation of policy intent has been successfully implemented within Australian schools. Exploring the new subject of Civics and Citizenship in Australia in the context of previous initiatives and existing research evidence, we explore the contested and complex nature of active citizenship around three key issues – the scope and form of action that constitutes citizenship in one's communities, how young people themselves conceptualize and experience participation, the potential that active citizenship opportunities are interpreted as being synonymous with the use of active teaching and learning methods. On this basis we argue that the new curriculum provides some optimism for those committed to education for citizenship in Australian schools, but that this optimism needs to be tempered with a degree of caution.

Introduction

In late 2013 a new curriculum for Civics and Citizenship education was published by the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority (hereafter, ACARA) for use in Australian schools. Though the curriculum awaits final endorsement by the current Liberal-led Coalition Government (subject to the implications of a review of the Australian Curriculum launched shortly after the Federal Election in September 2013 and published in October 2014), the curriculum is available for schools to use in their planning for the implementation of the new subject. Civics and Citizenship education is one of four subjects within the Humanities and Social Sciences learning area alongside History, Geography, and Economics and Business, and will be compulsory from years 3-8 (8-14 year olds) with a curriculum available from years 3-10. The development of the new curriculum subject forms part of the first ever national Australian Curriculum which has replaced the curricula of individual states and territories. Prior to the national curriculum, Civics and Citizenship education in Australia was typically subsumed within integrated social studies-based subjects, most commonly termed 'Studies of Society and Environment', within state/territory curricula, and/or was developed through a range of other, loosely connected schooling processes.

For those who have argued for greater recognition of education for citizenship within Australian schools the new subject represents a positive and welcome addition to the curriculum, formalising the need to teach pupils about civics and citizenship alongside the range of other processes and structures through which schools attempt to meet the wider goal expressed in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians that all young Australians become 'active and informed citizens' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 9). Indeed, there is room for some optimism regarding the place in which the subject finds itself. In line with many educational jurisdictions around the world, Australia now has a formal curricular subject through which pupils will (or at least should) learn to become politically literate, and active, citizens.

Building on previous curricular initiatives in relation to education for citizenship, and as the Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship document which informed the development of the new curriculum makes clear, the 'emphasis is on the role of active citizenship, both as explicit content and as a key outcome of Civics and Citizenship education' (ACARA, 2012, p. 3). Not wishing to diminish the significant progress made in establishing

Civics and Citizenship within the Australian Curriculum, we argue that there are important reasons to be cautious about the potential of the new subject to meet its aims and to fulfil its potential in engaging young Australians in active citizenship. The term "active citizenship" is one characterised both by its prevalence and its ambiguity. Indeed, a thematic study conducted by the international review of curriculum and assessment frameworks internet archive (INCA) across 20 countries found that 'the term 'active citizenship' is not yet clearly understood or defined' (Nelson and Kerr, 2006, p. iv).

We pick up on these contested understandings of active citizenship in more detail in the sections which follow, however it is worth briefly reflecting from the outset on the different ways in which active citizenship has been conceptualised within literature on education for citizenship. A typology instructive for this purpose, and one which is commonly drawn upon, is provided by Westheimer and Kahne (2004, p. 240) in their analysis of educating for democracy. According to this tri-fold classification, the personally responsible citizen is informed, responsible, law-abiding and willing to volunteer in a crisis. The participatory citizen represents an 'active member of community organizations' who supports and plays a part in leading concerted collective efforts to improve their communities. The justice-oriented citizen adopts a critical stance to structural inequalities and processes and seeks to bring about change. Notably, while each formulation of the citizen involves some form of participation, the extent and nature of this participation differs. Though the typology provided by Westheimer and Kahne is not precise in the sense that particular notions of active citizenship will necessarily fall neatly within one of the three conceptions (indeed, there can often be overlap between different positions), it does provide a useful prism through which the dominant ideas within conceptions can be teased out – something which we seek to do within our analysis.

In advancing our arguments here, we draw on literature from within Australia as well as the research literature on similar initiatives in other comparable jurisdictions to explore key issues for the Australian context. Following this introduction, the paper comprises two main sections. In the first we set out the recent context of Civics and Citizenship education in Australia, focusing on both the importance attached to the concept of active citizenship and the lack of translation of this policy intention into widespread practice in schools. In the second section we present three particular and prescient problems for determining active citizenship within Civics and Citizenship education that need further, careful consideration and elaboration if the aim of active citizenship is to be achieved – the scope and form of action that constitutes

citizenship in one's communities, how young people themselves conceptualize and experience participation, the potential that active citizenship opportunities are interpreted as being synonymous with the use of active teaching and learning methods. Throughout our analysis we use the term "Civics and Citizenship education" to refer to the formal curriculum subject that now forms a part of the Federal Australian Curriculum. In contrast, we use the wider term 'education for citizenship' to refer to the general educational aim and intention of preparing pupils for active and informed citizenship. This may include through the teaching of a formal curriculum subject, but also includes (and in recent history in Australia has typically consisted of) a range of other processes and practices, including school mission and ethos, extra-curricular activities, community links and values education.

Active citizenship in the recent Context of Civics and Citizenship education in Australia

As in most other nations, and certainly as has been the case in England, Scotland, Canada, and the United States, official policy surrounding education for citizenship over the last three decades in Australia has been characterised by two distinct features – (i) a sense of crisis in young peoples' political knowledge and action, and (ii) bold intentions at policy and curricular level that fail to turn into widespread effective practice in schools (Hughes, Print and Sears, 2010; Leighton, 2012). Taken together, these two features have resulted in a context in which active citizenship is cited as a much needed and highly valuable aim of education and schooling in Australia, but which may not be enacted and experienced in frequent, consistent and equitable ways by young Australians.

The appeal to a sense of crisis in the political understanding and action of young people has been a common feature in most Western democracies over the last thirty years (Putnam, 2000; Arthur, 2003; Barber, 2003). Indeed, in the late 1980s and early 1990s this sense of crisis – or what Arthur (2003, p. 3) has termed the 'litany of alarm' – was a fundamental policy driver in focusing attention on the need for greater focus on education for citizenship in Australian schools (Haigh, Murcia and Norris, 2013). In Australia, the Senate Committee enquiry on Education for Active Citizenship (SSCEET, 1989) 'painted a bleak picture' of the low-level of political knowledge and understanding among young Australians, and indeed Australians more generally' (Hughes, Print and Sears, 2010, p. 297). The Senate Committee (1989, p. 7) argued, for example, that it regarded 'the retreat into apathy and ignorance as opening the way for a victory of self-centredness over a sense of community responsibility', citing 'a remarkable

level of ignorance in the Australian population about even quite elementary of politics and government' (p. 9). On this basis the Senate Committee recommended that 'the Commonwealth initiate a national program in education for active citizenship, directed at the whole community' and that 'the Commonwealth designate education for active citizenship as a priority area for improvements in primary and secondary schooling', with the latter being to be strongly encouraged among 'State and non-governmental school authorities' (1989, p. 6). It is notable that, in doing so, the Committee (1989, p. 7) referred throughout to education for active citizenship, which it defined in the following terms:

> An active citizen is not someone who has simply accumulated a store
> of facts about the workings of the political system… Essentially, it is
> a question of active commitment to democracy. An active citizen in the
> Committee's view is someone who not only believes in the concept of a
> democratic society but who is willing and able to translate that belief into
> action.

This focus on education for active citizenship was clarified and extended in the Senate Committee's (1991, p. 7) follow-up report and also in the work of the Civics Expert Group that was established in light of the Senate enquiries by the then Labor government. Again the CEG made great play of the 'civic deficit' in their report Whereas the People: Civics and Citizenship Education in Australia (CEG, 1994). In one of their most pointed assertions, the CEG (1994: 18) suggested that there was 'widespread ignorance and misconception of Australia's system of government, about its origins and about the way in which it can serve the needs of citizens'. The perception of low-levels of political understanding among young Australians was also supported by academic literature on education for citizenship around this time (Kennedy, Watts and McDonald, 1993; Print, 1995a; Print, 1995b). Again, education for active citizenship was identified as crucial in addressing this gap, with the CEG (1994, p. 6) explaining its intention that the objective of education for citizenship should be not only to 'enable Australians to discharge the formal obligations of citizenship, such as voting and compliance with the law', but 'more than this… should include those measures that would help Australians become active citizens'. In these statements the focus on active citizenship is paramount, and in drawing on fulfilling ones legal obligations (in Australia voting is compulsory) as well as wider engagement in communities could be said to be shaped around notions of both the personally responsible and the participatory citizen.

The second feature of policy initiatives in education for citizenship is the extent to which they conform to the following tendency across a number of jurisdictions identified by Kerr (1999, p. 204) of '…noble intentions, which are then turned into general pronouncements, which, in turn, become minimal guidance for schools', a view informed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civic Education study across 24 countries (Torney-Purta, Schwille and Amadeo, 1999). Indeed, recognition of this "gap" between curriculum intention and implementation was evident in the reasoning the Senate Committee (1989, p. 20) when it argued that:

> Formal statements of curriculum objectives at both State and Commonwealth level regularly feature a commitment to equip students with the capacity to understand and participate in the democratic processes of the society around them. There appears to be universal agreement that this is an educational goal of major importance. An examination of what in fact occurs in schools, however, leaves a rather different impression and casts some doubt on the strength of this commitment.

The work of the CEG informed the development of units for teaching Civics and Citizenship in Australian schools. Funded at the Federal level, the Discovering Democracy units provided for the teaching of Civics and Citizenship but without its establishment as a curricular subject (the curriculum remained under the jurisdiction of the individual states/territories). While the Discovering Democracy units and their associated professional development for teachers perhaps moved beyond being 'minimal guidance' their impact was limited by their non-compulsory nature. According to research conducted a year after the Discovering Democracy materials were sent to schools, their use by teachers was 'haphazard at best', with the 'adoption and use' of these materials within schools being 'somewhat superficial' (Print, 2001b, p. 141). The Evaluation Reports of the Discovering Democracy program paint a similar picture, and point to the 'great variation… found both in the depth and breadth of implementation of the program' (ECG, 1999, p. 7).

A number of commentators in Australia also criticised the Discovery Democracy materials for focusing too heavily on a narrow economic and social understanding of citizenship. This approach to active citizenship was informed by the "neoliberal" public policy of then Prime Minister, John Howard, and focused on the active citizen as a consumer of public services and

as a community-minded volunteer within the local neighbourhood. Reid and Gill (2010, p. 23), for example, suggest that under Howard the concept of citizenship was 'narrowed and diluted' in a way that prioritised 'individual choice' and 'competition' (p. 26) alongside the promotion of a conservative form of Australian identity to be promoted through the placing of Values of Australian Schooling posters in school corridors (this was required in order to receive federal funding). To return to the Westheimer and Kahne's typology, the dominant form of active citizenship being expounded combined the 'personally responsible' citizen with the 'participatory citizen', but conceived participation social terms. Indeed a key feature of the criticisms aimed at both Howard's wider conception of citizenship as well as the Discovery Democracy materials was their lack of commitment to a more political conception of active citizenship through which young Australians might learn to engage critically in political decision-making processes and structures while recognizing the cultural diversity of contemporary Australia. At a time when the Review of the Australian Curriculum (Australian Government, 2014, p. 198) has recommended that the Civics and Citizenship curriculum be recast to include greater focus on 'the importance of community service as a key component of citizenship', the distinction between social (which has traditionally been the scope of "community service") and political conceptions of active citizenship are highly pertinent.

Of particular importance to our focus here is the finding over the second evaluation period (2000-2003) that less than a third of schools taught 'student citizenship participation activities' (ECG, 2003, p. 10). Indeed, literature published at the time resoundingly criticised the materials for their 'minimalist approach' and for their 'heavy reliance on an 'historical knowledge' approach, at the expense of 'active citizenship' (Criddle et al. 2004, p. 36; see also, Robinson and Parkin, 1997; Gill and Reid, 1999). Hughes, Print and Sears (2010, p. 302) have argued that 'if recent measures of student outcomes are any guide to teacher inputs, then young Australians have learnt little from Discovering Democracy'. Indeed, the 2006 report of the triennial National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship found that pupils' 'level of knowledge and understanding of civics and citizenship education is less than was expected by a range of experts in the field'.

The impact of the Discovering Democracy initiative on pupil learning was compromised for a number of reasons. Perhaps most significantly while the initiative was formed and funded at the Federal level education, curricular and structures at the time were determined at the level of individual States and Territories, none of whom made education for citizenship a

compulsory subject. This, in itself, was problematic given international evidence that the production of curriculum materials is not necessarily sufficient for meaningful education for citizenship to result without the concomitant commitment to a compulsory subject discipline (Kerr, 2000). Given the wide range of competing pressures on the school curriculum timetable, the actual amount of education for citizenship experienced by pupils was limited. According to Taylor (2000, p. 5; emphasis original) 'the implementation of DD [Discovering Democracy] whilst successful in parts, [wa]s hampered by a variety of factors, including lack of whole school commitment'. As such, in the mid-2000s education for citizenship remained, at best, an integrated cross-curricular theme and/or an extra-curricular focus rather than a subject in its own right.

While the Discovering Democracy materials represented a significant investment in financial and curricular terms, its effect on pupil learning was further undermined by the lack of continued specific teacher preparation and development in education for citizenship. This lack of teacher education and development in education for citizenship is a recurring theme in the Australian context (Print, Kennedy and Hughes, 1999; Chin and Barber, 2010). Though there was some initial in-service education to support teachers in using the Discovering Democracy materials, such support was not sustained in terms of either practicing teachers or pre-service teacher education students (Print, 2001a; Hughes, Print and Sears, 2010). The earlier Senate Committee (1989, p. 6) report had set as one of its recommendations that higher education institutions 'with responsibility for teacher education' not only 'ensure that education faculties recognise the importance of education for active citizenship' but also that they 'make provision for it as a component in pre-service courses'. The basis for this requirement was based on a scathing view of the readiness of pre-service teachers to educate for active citizenship. Reflecting on its original report, the Senate Committee (1991, p. 47) commented not only that 'skilled and dynamic teachers in the active citizenship field were in short supply' but that 'many teachers had a clear dislike and lack of interest in politics which resulted in dull and mechanical teaching'. The Senate Committee went on to claim that a 'vicious circle of apathy and inadequacy – from schools to teacher training institutions to schools – seemed to be firmly entrenched'.

This lack of teacher expertise and commitment was telling. Research conducted nationally in Australia shortly before the Discovering Democracy materials were sent to schools indicated that even amongst teachers of Studies of Society and Environment (or its equivalent) 54% were

completely unaware of the Discovering Democracy program (Print, 2001b). Data collected as part of the IEA civic education teacher survey in the late 1990s indicates that while the teachers most likely to be involved in its teaching (those teaching Studies of Society and Environment and English) were committed to education for citizenship 'only third… had had any training in discipline areas related to civics during their initial teacher training courses' (Mellor, 2003, p. 8). Once more, evidence from Australia (Print, 1996; Chin and Barber, 2010) and elsewhere (see, for example, Keating, et al. 2009) suggests not only that teachers often lack confidence in teaching education for citizenship – including active citizenship – but that this can translate into the avoidance of such issues within the curriculum and classroom.

To summarise this section, the period from the late 1980s to the mid-2000s was one in which policy intentions concerning the importance of, and need for, education for citizenship in Australian schools were strong. It was also a period in which the translation of these intentions into effective and widespread practice in schools was limited by a number of factors, including a lack of curriculum recognition, issues concerning teacher commitment, and low levels of specific teacher development and education. By the late 2000s the need for effective education for citizenship was restated in both the Melbourne Goals and the development of a Statement of Learning for Civics and Citizenship, both of which informed the establishment of the subject within the newly formed Australian curriculum. In sketching the key policy intentions and interventions, we argue not only that each of these features have characterised policy regarding education for citizenship in Australia, but also that an understanding of them is important in conceiving the challenges faced by Civics and Citizenship in the new curriculum.

Conceptualising active citizenship: some problems for determining the active dimension of Civics and Citizenship education

As we suggested above Civics and Citizenship education is being introduced as a formal curriculum subject for Australian schools within a given context, one which has implications for the teaching of active citizenship. In light of this context, and on the basis of recognizing the contested nature of active citizenship within international literature on education for citizenship, in this section we explore a number of reasons why optimism over the introduction of the Civics and Citizenship education – and in particular about its development of active citizens – should be treated with a degree of caution. Essentially, these reasons are concerned with the contested nature of active citizenship and the sorts of educational structures and

processes that relate to education for active citizenship. As Lawson (2001, p. 166) reminds us, and as Westhemier and Kahne's typology highlights, 'beliefs about what active citizenship entails differ greatly'. Active citizenship is intimately bound with the interaction of the individual with, and within, the communities they inhabit and in which they interact – including how such "communities" are envisaged. While there is not scope to do full justice to the wide-ranging debates regarding different interpretations of active citizenship, we focus our analysis on three particular points around which there is a large degree of contestation in relation to how community is understood, each of which interacts with how active citizenship might be conceived within the new Civics and Citizenship curriculum.

Before exploring the three points of contestation it is important to make explicit the curriculum requirements for the active citizenship dimension of the Civics and Citizenship curriculum. It is clear that active citizenship is not the sole content of the curriculum. Rather, it sits alongside (and we would argue is importantly inter-related with) a knowledge of the Australian political and legal systems, an understanding of diverse interested alongside a commitment to cohesion, and the development of critical thinking skills such as questioning, problem solving, analysis and communication. This said, 'the role of active citizenship' within the curriculum is clearly central 'both as explicit content and as a key outcome of Civics and Citizenship education' (ACARA 2012, p. 3; emphasis added). This active dimension is expressed through a range of different terms (indeed, that it is so points to the need for the analysis we provide here). For example, the Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship (ACARA, 2012) includes the terms "active participation", "participation and representation", "community involvement", "community activities", "civic engagement", "community service", "community decision-making", "civil behaviour", "contributing to civil society", "community projects", "fundraising", and "volunteer work". Furthermore, and unlike other jurisdictions (such as England and Ontario) where community involvement and participation have been explicitly stated as central skills or strands within the subject, the curriculum for Civics and Citizenship education leaves some scope for ambiguity (Davies, 2013). The rationale for the subject refers to the intention of active and informed citizenship, while the aims suggest that a key skill to be fostered is 'responsible participation in Australia's democracy' (ACARA, 2013). However, in the actual skills that sit alongside the Civics and Citizenship knowledge and understanding, any sense of participation is framed within the skill 'problem solving and decision-making'. This includes 'students working collaboratively, negotiating and developing strategies to resolve issues, and planning for action' (ACARA, 2013). The focus, therefore, is

on planning for action rather than the actual action itself. Moreover, while students are to learn about 'how and why groups, including religious groups, participate in civic life', this requirement is passive (learning about participation rather than through participation) and comes at Year 9 (14-15 years of age) when Civics and Citizenship is no longer compulsory.

The first point of contestation we consider regards the scope and form of action that constitutes active *citizenship in one's communities.* The international literature on education for citizenship abounds with distinctions between minimal/classical liberal understandings of citizenship and maximal/communitarian/civic republican interpretations (Hughes, Reid and Sears, 2010; Peterson, 2011; Davies, 2012). Here – and as suggested in the introduction – we use the frame of Westheimer and Kahne's classification of the personally responsible citizen, the participatory citizen, and the justice-oriented citizen, as illustrative of significant tensions aligned to how active citizenship is conceived. Two, related aspects of the typology are of particular importance – the prominence placed on engagement within community/ies and the actions which this engagement might comprise.

Engagement within one's communities is clearly a central prerequisite of active citizenship. As Annette (2008, p. 392) suggests community, however, 'is an elastic concept which allows for an enormous range of meanings'. Evidence suggests (Bellah et al. 1985; Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; Putnam 2000), that community combines the social with the psychological, meaning that community is not only about where and how one engages but also about how one identifies (or not) with given communities. Within his influential theory, Wenger (1998; see also Lave and Wenger 1991) conceives communities in terms of practice. For Wenger, communities of practice are co-operative endeavours, which share a notion of identity derived from that particular community. Such identities (and the communities themselves) are continuously the subject of dialogical development as members understand and shape their relationships within and to the community in question. As Lave and Wenger (1991) point out, participation within a community of practice can be, in and of itself, educative. For these reasons, communities can be multiple, fluid and dynamic. In turn, how community is understood (including the communities within which a young person has a lived experience) may differ according to time and place.

Inter-related to how community might be understood are ideas around the types of actions which constitute active citizens. We have already suggested in the previous section that the

notion of active citizenship favoured by the Howard government at the time of the Discovering Democracy intitiative was one that combined economic liberalism (citizen as consumer) with social conservatism (citizen as volunteer). A further illustration of different forms and forums for action is provided in the research literature which followed the introduction of Citizenship education into the curriculum for secondary schools in England. The leading architect of Citizenship education, in England, the late Sir Bernard Crick (2002), sought to differentiate between forms of social service/volunteering central to "good" citizenship and forms of political engagement equating to "active" citizenship. According to a number of commentators, including Crick himself, the latter should take preference over the former. (Nelson and Kerr 2006; Crick, 2002), while for others the two forms are differentiated, but equally important, expressions of citizenship (United Nations, 2004; Hart et al. 2007; Peterson, 2011). Similarly, and as Sears (2013) highlights, in their review of community service-learning in the social studies in the United States Wade and Saxe (1996, p. 346) describe activities akin to volunteering and fundraising as poor practice. They draw on evidence to suggest that in forms of active citizenship which promote a 'charitable conception of service and do not tie their activities to political issues or organizations, participants are less likely… to increase political efficacy' compared to programs that 'focused on political issues, local government, and / or social action'. As Everett (1998, p. 299) suggests the educational benefits of service-learning depend on 'critically examining… beliefs or the structural causes of the need for such services to exist. Simply 'doing' is not sufficient for learning to occur'. This suggests that effective active citizenship activities require some form of educational process that engages with the political dimensions of the curriculum if active citizenship is to result in a meaningful way.

A pertinent instance of the flexible and dynamic nature of community is provided by changing patterns in youth participation, particularly in terms of emerging patterns of social media use and the existence of "online communities". Bennett (2003), for example, refers to the contemporary condition of 'networked individualism' brought about by the interconnectedness available to people as a result of new technologies. Bennett (2003, p. 147) defines this as 'the ease of establishing personal links that enable people to join more diverse and more numerous political communities than they would ordinarily join in the material world'. In contrast to a civic deficit model of young people's political participation, it is argued by some commentators that as "digital natives" young people are helping to lead new forms of online engagement in the public sphere (Jenkins, 2006; cf. Bennett, Wells and Freelon, 2011). We currently know little about the relationship between engagement with digital and social media and different

characterisations of active citizenship. Indeed current, research on online youth civic engagement remains somewhat tentative, and precludes generalizable judgements about its scope, nature and impact (Bennett, Wells and Freelon, 2011). The lack of clarity regarding how young people are using social media as a tool for active citizenship may reflect the varied nature of, and possibilities for, political engagement on the Internet. Vromen (2008, p. 81; emphasis in the original) summarises three primary uses of the Internet as a political space for participation. First, the Internet acts as an 'information source' through which political institutions, interest groups and various forms of the media raise awareness of particular issues and concerns. Second, the Internet acts as a "communication medium" though which people can converse with each other through a range of different forums (emails, blogs, forums etc.) and at a range of different levels. Third, the Internet acts as a 'virtual public space', enabling users to come together to share ideas and to discuss them in a critical manner to develop and form opinions as a collective. This raises interesting and pertinent questions regarding how such engagement might relate to Westheimer and Kahne's typology of citizenship. Clearly, more research is needed about the forms of active citizenship which are being experienced by young Australians within and through digital and social media.

The second, and related, area of contestation relates to how young people themselves conceptualize and experience participation. We have already noted that communities themselves involve both the social and psychological. Given that how young people conceptualize and experience participation is likely to be affected by their experiences of such engagement, this requires us to consider not only those participatory activities that students do (or might) experience in school, but also those which they have experienced outside of their formal education and schooling. The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship (2012, p. 5) paper recognises that the 'participation of citizenship takes place at many levels – within the home/family, classes within schools, within workplaces, within communities, within our nation and internationally'. This is an important recognition. However, the evidence about current levels of young people's political and social participation, and in particular how young people themselves conceive of this, presents a mixed and complex picture.

In part, this complexity lies in the extent to which young people are engaged in active citizenship at all. Drawing on data from the IEA Civic Education study of 14-15 year olds, Kennedy (2007, p. 318) suggests that 'even at this early stage, civic disengagement is the

underlying construct that characterises young people's thinking'. Current research from elsewhere presents a mixed picture of young people's involvement within their communities, particularly with regard to the relationships between such engagement and schooling. Recent studies by Arthur et al. (2009), Mason et al. (2010) and Keating et al. (2010) all point to the fact that whilst a significant minority of young people between the ages of 14 and 16 are engaged in some form of community involvement, for many this is not a feature of their education or wider lives. In their study into the civic engagement of young people living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, Mason et al. (2010, 12) report that, when asked, young people viewed 'school [as] an important site where [they] can be civically engaged . . . yet more than half of respondents did not report volunteering or helping others at school'.

To return to the Australian context, the most recent report of the triennial National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship (hereafter NAP-CC; ACARA, 2010, p. xxii), which included questionnaire data on the engagement of year 6 and year 10 students in civics and citizenship activities indicates that 'more than half of the Year 10 students have participated in voluntary community activities or collection for charities'. However, 'only small numbers… indicated that they had engaged in other activities like environmental or human rights organisations or participated in youth development groups'. This seems to suggest that for these students engagement in personally responsible forms of citizenship is more frequent than in participatory or justice-oriented forms.

Further evidence which suggests this is the case if provided by Print (2007, p. 327) who argues that young people's participation is 'frequently episodic or idiosyncratic in nature around a single / limited issue rather than sustained'. Focusing in particular on young people's intention to vote, Print (2007, p. 334) has drawn on data from the Australian Youth Electoral Study to suggest a 'lack of connectedness' between young people and 'democratic participation with everyday politics'. Print's argument here is not that young people are necessarily disinterested in, or unaware of, politics and political participation, but that this interest is restricted by a lack of efficacy, a lack of trust in political leaders, and an overall 'reluctance to commit to participate in political matters'. The NAP-CC, also points to a 'notable decrease in trust' in civic institutions 'between year 6 and 10' (ACARA, 2010, p. xx), also suggesting that 'most students were not at all or not very interested in Australian politics' (p. xxiii). Perhaps of more concern is the finding that while year 10 students expressed either certain or probable intent to 'inform themselves about candidates prior to an election campaign, few students expected more active

forms of engagement and only 10 per cent considered joining a political party in the future' (p. xxiv).

This is a view that echoes previous research on young people's perceptions of civic engagement in Australia. In their study conducted with 18-24 year olds in 1997, Beresford and Phillips (1997, p. 15) found that young people reported 'a strong sense of powerlessness, a conviction that they either lacked the skills to understand the relevance of the system and/or that they lacked faith in its ability to produce tangible outcomes' (cf. Krinks, 1999). The problem, according to this evidence, is not one of young people being uninterested, but feeling a lack of empowerment and confidence in the system. This finding is of particular relevance when we consider Australia's increasingly multicultural and diverse social composition. Given such diverse interests it is likely that students from different socio-economic and cultural communities will understand, experience and engage with their communities in different and diverse ways, and are that such differences may also impact on barriers to participation. Recent studies in Australia have found 'connection between low levels of participation and a lack of access to economic resources' (Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2014: 14). Similarly, a number of studies have evidenced that new young immigrants to Australia are unlikely to engage in community activities outside of those specific to their own ethnic or religious commitments (Holdsworth et al., 2007; Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2013) and that:

> Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds can often feel excluded from
> not only from mainstream political processes, but also from day to day levels
> of participation. The complex range of barriers young people from migrant and
> refugee backgrounds often encounter can result in them being unable to shape their
> own lives as they had hoped, resulting in feelings of disempowerment
> and marginalization.
> (Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2014, p. 14).

A further tension regarding how young people conceptualise and experience participation is the extent to which these compare and contrast to those of their teachers. While there is some evidence that teachers in Australia view active- and engagement-based forms of civic learning (such as participating in peaceful protest, engaging in political discussion, participating in activities of benefit to the community, and participating in activities to protect the environment) to be important to education for citizenship (Chin and Barber, 2010), little evidence currently

exists about the relationship between teacher and student conceptions of active citizenship in the Australian context. Research conducted in England in relation to a Government sponsored youth social action program evidenced that there were significant differences between how the teachers responsible for co-ordinating activities portrayed these compared to the meanings and understandings attached to them by students (Durrant, et al. 2012). While teachers viewed participation in wide and expansive terms (reporting for example that their students engaged in activities), the students themselves reported such involvement in limited terms. Further research is needed to ascertain whether similar differences exist in Australia.

The third point of contention is the potential that active citizenship opportunities are interpreted as being synonymous with the use of active teaching and learning methods within Civics and Citizenship. Active citizenship as a learning process can be understood as relating to the idea of experiential learning, with students learning through the experience of undertaking active citizenship projects (whether in the school or the wider community). As such, active citizenship education in this sense relates firmly to Kolb's (Kolb, 1998) reflective cycle in which learners start with their own 'concrete experience' and progress through 'reflective observation', 'abstract conceptualisation' and 'active experimentation', before returning to 'concrete experience'. The stages of Kolb's cycle necessarily involve (and indeed support) students to draw out key learning from their activities. This learning includes citizenship knowledge and skills, as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal reflection. A second understanding of "active" citizenship – which presents it in terms of active teaching and learning methods – involves students' learning about a citizenship topic or issue through active rather than passive pedagogies, for example through interactive classroom-based activities, such as discussions, debates and role-plays. These are skills and strategies which are clearly intended by the Civics and Citizenship curriculum, but not which in and of themselves equate to the goal of active citizenship in terms of participatory democracy; that is, without in some way effecting the decision-making process or seeking to bring about some form of change.

While we would not wish to diminish the importance of active learning methods to Civics and Citizenship education, we would question the extent to which these can be considered in and of themselves as forms of active citizenship (as for example has been the stance adopted by some, for example Bauer, Clarke and Dailidiene, 2003). Active learning methods may be necessary for active citizenship, but they are not constitutive of it. Two reasons for this seem

prescient. The first concerns the legacy of such educational activity. Similarly to previous curricular initiatives, a central feature of the reasoning behind Civics and Citizenship education in Australia is that enabling pupils to be active citizens whilst at schools will encourage and develop greater levels of participation in future adult life (ACARA, 2012). In other words, participation in civic and civil activity leads to further levels of engagement. The American political and public theorist Benjamin Barber explains the nature of this educational process is one in which '[T]he taste for participation is whetted by participation: democracy breeds democracy' (Barber, 1984:, p. 265). As Wade (2008, p. 114) points out, there is developing evidence that when pupils engage in service-learning activities which provide opportunities to engage in political activity, positive effects on civic obligation result. We should be careful, therefore, that the educational and societal importance of pupils' experience in active citizenship activities is not reduced by it remaining solely, or even largely, interpreted as classroom-based active teaching and learning methods. Indeed, a large-scale research project that accompanied the introduction and implementation of Citizenship education in the English National Curriculum for secondary schools highlighted that the 'link between active citizenship outside the classroom and citizenship learning in the classroom is not always apparent, to students or staff (Keating, et al., 2009, p. 57; emphasis in the original).

The second reason for raising concerns about the potential limitations of viewing active learning as constitutive of active citizenship regards its oversimplification of the learning and educational structures and approaches necessary for effective active citizenship. To return to Westheimer and Kahne's classification, while active learning may well be conducive to developing participation it tells us nothing about the particular conception of active citizenship at which such participation may be aimed. That this is so is perhaps most clearly illustrated in relation to justice-oriented citizenship. There is a significant body of work within the Australian context which suggests that developing a sense of justice requires particular pedagogies and an appreciation of what children themselves bring to their educational experiences (Hattam and Zipin, 2009; Hayes et al., 2009; Sellar and Cormack, 2009). Moreover, educating for a justice orientation requires an organisational commitment within the school to work with, rather than against, diversity and difference, and is based on the operation of just and respectful relationships (Crawford, 2010). As Hinchey (2006, p. 128) suggests, active citizenship education therefore requires that teachers:

> Engage in an honest and detailed examination of the way existing power

structures shape experience, resulting both in unearned privilege for some and
unfair disadvantages for others; offer students the respectful treatment,
valid voice, and relevant curriculum that is their due as human beings.

Here we are also conscious of the research evidence that suggests that genuine structures and processes for young people's active citizenship require more than a pedagogical commitment and need to extend beyond the classroom in a way that is genuinely supported by schools as democratic institutions (Holdsworth et al., 2007; Keating et al., 2010; Leighton, 2012). That is, in order to meaningfully promote democratic participation schools need themselves to become democratic institutions based on productive and respectful relationships.

Conclusion

In our analysis we have sought to identify and explore some of the main reasons why active citizenship forms an important, though complex, part of Civics and Citizenship education. At the time when Civics and Citizenship education is being introduced into the Australian curriculum there is not clear evidence that previous initiatives have translated into effective community-based active citizenship programs across Australian schools – action that is that transcends the school gates and which involves a political dimension. Indeed, evidence suggests that the intention of active citizenship Australian schools remains largely unfulfilled. In such an environment active citizenship remains dependent on small pockets of effective teaching and learning rather than widespread and institutionalised good practice.

Previous curricular experiences from within the Australian context, and indeed from overseas, suggest that while a defined curriculum subject is an important and necessary condition for effective education for citizenship, it is not in itself sufficient. In this environment, and particularly given the complexities explored here, the teaching and learning of active citizenship remains problematic. Recognising the complexities and developing practice that seeks to in some way reflect the contested nature of active citizenship – including how this is understood and experienced by young people – is an important first step if the aim of educating informed and active citizens is to avoid once more becoming an unfulfilled expectation of Australian schooling.

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