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Citizenship Education in New Zealand policy and practice

Introduction

The desire to mould citizens through curricula and educational initiatives is reflected in government policy around the world. Schools can be thought of as an aggregation of the values, aspirations and ideals held by society and sites where a range of strategies are employed to attempt to shape young citizens in certain ways (Staeheli, 2011). New Zealand is no exception.

From the first Education Act in 1877 through to the latest New Zealand curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), successive governments have attempted to engender the dispositions, skills and understandings perceived as constituting responsible, 'good' citizens through a variety of citizenship education initiatives. However, while there is generally consensus that citizenship education

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is a desirable thing, there is far less agreement about what kind of citizen should be sought and what kind of community best promotes citizenship (Faulks, 2000; Westheimer and Kahne, 2004).

Internationally and nationally we have witnessed a renewed public sector interest in citizenship education in the past two decades. Brooks and Holford (2009) refer to an 'explosion' of interest in citizenship, matched by the development and extension of citizenship education in many countries. In New Zealand, citizenship is a key focus of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007), specifically within the social sciences but also as a cross-curricular theme. More recently, renewed attention to civics and citizenship education has been stimulated by an awareness of an increasingly diverse society and fears of diminishing social cohesion, alongside concerns about declining traditional democratic participation, and ongoing debates about Crown/Māori relationships. For example, in the past three years public debate on the health of our democracy has been galvanised by national discussions on declining voter participation (Electoral Commission, 2013, 2014; Justice and Electoral Committee, 2016) and the nature of our constitution (Constitutional Advisory Panel, 2013). These have drawn attention to the multiple ways New Zealand citizens describe their sense of identity and belonging and the role and nature of civics and citizenship education (Justice and Electoral Committee, 2016; Ministry for Culture and Heritage and Wellington Museums Trust, 2016; New Zealand Political Studies Association, 2016).

This article locates these recent calls for citizenship education across the New Zealand political spectrum within an historical context, and examines the different versions of citizenship education which have emerged over time. Our central question is: what form of citizenship education could lead to informed, active and critical citizens, and also accommodate the considerable diversity that is a marker of New Zealand society today? We examine recent research from New Zealand classrooms to consider what students know, their political aspirations and their experiences of citizenship education. We draw on recent New Zealand and international research to offer a framework for effective citizenship. In conclusion, we argue that realising the potential held by critically active approaches requires cross-sector collaboration that engages with citizenship education's contested past, present and future.

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In this article we adopt a distinction that is commonly made between 'civics' and 'citizenship' education, and is employed in the 2009 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICSS). *Civic education* focuses on knowledge and understanding of formal institutions and processes of civic life (such as voting in elections). *Citizenship education* focuses on knowledge and understanding and on opportunities for participation and engagement in both civic and civil society. It is concerned with the wider range of ways in which citizens interact with and shape their communities (including schools) and societies (Schulz et al., 2010, p.22).[1]

Historical contexts for New Zealand citizenship education

Citizenship has had a long-standing and central presence in New Zealand's curriculum, although there has never been a curriculum subject called 'citizenship education'. Instead, the social studies curriculum has traditionally been the main vehicle for citizenship education in New Zealand, since the Thomas Report (Consultative Committee on the Post-primary School Curriculum, 1944), which first recommended the introduction of social studies as an integrated social sciences course in the post-primary school curriculum. However, it is also important to note that citizenship has always been recognised as an important cross-curricular theme that can be developed through a wide range of informal learning and community participation experiences (Mutch, 2013; Schulz et al., 2010).

Our precis of governments' attempts to socialise young people into becoming certain types of citizens begins in the interwar years with the *Syllabus of Instruction for Public Schools* (Department of Education, 1928), which conceived of schools as microcosms of society in which children were to be 'trained for the wider service of humanity' (p.64) and teachers were to model virtuous behaviour and restraint. However, following World War Two this traditional, conservative citizenship ethic was reshaped to align with the first Labour government's desire for a well-balanced education open to all (Openshaw, 1995). The 1944 Thomas Committee envisioned an effective citizen as committed to democracy and social reconstruction: 'one who has a lively sense of responsibility towards civilised values, who can make firm social judgements, and who acts intelligently and in the common interest' (Consultative Committee on the Post-primary School Curriculum, 1944,

p.23). This statement signals a competing vision for citizenship that is repeated in many subsequent curricula, centred on a tension between the cultivation of independent thought and socialisation through the transmission of citizenship virtues. As Eric Archer and Roger Openshaw wryly comment:

> Being committed to 'civilised values' and being taught to act 'in the common interest' do not appear to be self-evidently 'democratic', yet these imperatives were, presumably, to override the necessity of 'forming social judgements' should the goals conflict in any way. The citizenship transmission leopard, even in its liberal-progressive guise, still displayed its procedural spots. (Archer and Openshaw, 1992, p.24)

This tension between critical citizenship and citizenship transmission remained apparent in social studies curricula in the 1960s and 70s (Department of Education, 1961, 1977). On the one hand, both syllabi were committed to young people's social and political development. The young citizen of the 1961 syllabus was, for example, to 'think clearly about social problems' and take a 'sympathetic interest' in the lives of others around the world (p.1). Similarly, the 1977 syllabus guidelines endorsed an inquiry approach to the development of four key dimensions of citizenship: knowledge, abilities, values and social action. However, a spirit of open-ended inquiry was inevitably tempered by a desire for particular commitments. The 1961 syllabus, for example, encouraged adherence to 'standards of behaviour that are necessary for … responsible people in our society' (Department of Education, 1961, p.2). In a similar vein, the child of the 1977 document was expected 'to respect human dignity, to show concern for others, to respect and accept the idea of difference and to uphold justice' (Department of Education, 1977, p.5).

Arguably, debates as to what kind of citizen should be endorsed featured most acutely in the curriculum reforms of the 1990s. For the social studies curriculum this led to the development of three curricula, following the public rejection of the first two developments due to political and ideological divisions (O'Neill, Clark and Openshaw, 2004). Hunter and Keown (2001) summarise the contentious redrafting of the social studies curriculum in the two versions of 1994 and 1996 as involving two dominant discourses of citizenship: broadly speaking, liberal-democratic and neo-liberal. As a compromise position, *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1997) did little to resolve the ideological tensions, instead positioning young citizens as accountable to both agendas (Mutch, 2013).

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During the more recent curriculum review, local, national and global citizenship was identified as an important cross-curricular theme in the 2002 *Curriculum Stocktake Report* (Ministry of Education, 2002). This was taken up in the subsequent *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007), which liberally deploys the language of citizenship in its vision and principles, with the aim of creating 'critical and creative thinkers' and 'informed decision makers' who are 'actively involved participants in a range of life contexts' (p.4). Citizenship aims are most specifically addressed in the social sciences curriculum, which states that students 'explore how societies work and how they themselves, can participate and take action as critical, informed, and responsible citizens' (p.17).

In many ways New Zealand's current curriculum reflects many others in the Asia–Pacific region, which are a pastiche of multiple traditions of progressivism (Kennedy, 2008) and citizenship education (Barr et al., 1997). These traditions include child development approaches (student/child-centred pedagogies), social efficiency approaches (preparing workers who can contribute to an efficient, smoothly run economy) and social reconstructionist approaches (preparing future citizens as agents of social change and social justice) (Kliebard, 1986). Such approaches are less reliant on one essentialist perspective and therefore more capable of meeting the needs of multiple stakeholders (Kennedy, 2008, p.20). While this may meet pragmatic policy needs, it does mean that ideals of 'effective' and 'successful' citizenship (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.4) can be very vague in practice. Bolstad's analysis of New Zealand's ICCS data confirms this by concluding that there is an inconsistent view across New Zealand schools about what 'civic and citizenship education' ought to involve and what means are effective in developing students' competencies (Bolstad, 2012, p.32).

Towards critically active citizenship

Having traced this brief history of New Zealand citizenship education through social studies curricula, we can see some consistent patterns. First, while there has been an ongoing focus on civic education, including through moral inculcation and imparting civic knowledge, this has never been the only approach. Instead, post-1944 approaches have increasingly endorsed the notion of critical and active citizenship, consistent with the view that social studies should support children 'to interpret and respond to social situations rather than merely describe them' (Department of Education, 1983, p.3). This shift towards more critically active citizenship is evident

in the language of successive social studies curricula: from clear thinking about social problems (1961), to *how* such problems might be addressed (1977), to 'social decision-making' (1997), to citizens who 'take action' (2007, p.17). However, and secondly, there remain ongoing tensions between the ideals of compliant and more critical and active citizens conveyed in these curricula.

Perhaps the question to turn to is just what kind our society wants. Kennedy and Mellor (2005) suggest that:

> This is the key curriculum issue for the future – what should future citizens know and be able to do, and how can such access to knowledge be guaranteed? Without an answer to this question, the future of democracy may well be at risk. (p.56)

Expressed elsewhere as a tension between 'socialisation and counter-socialisation' (Engle and Ochoa, 1998), the central dilemma for social educators is whether they should stick with the kind of citizenship that is highly adaptable to the status quo (thus creating 'employable and quiet' future citizens/consumers), or whether they should encourage citizens who challenge existing structures (Openshaw, 2004). Westheimer and Kahne (2004) outline three kinds of citizens that democratic societies can work to produce: *personally responsible citizens* have a good character and are honest, law-abiding members of the community; *participatory citizens* actively take part in leadership roles within established community structures to improve society; *social justice-oriented citizens* question established social structures and work against injustice in society. In their view, education ideally develops citizens who not only endorse values that support the nation and its government, but actively critique and speak out against aspects of society and governance that they disagree with. In striking a balance between unity and diversity, such a 'critically active' approach invites young citizens to consider critical responses to societal challenges and to understand democracy as a chief means for accommodating difference.

If a critically active citizenship response is desired, just what is happening in New Zealand classrooms? In the next section we explore the current New Zealand research evidence that sheds light on teachers' and students' preparedness for critically active approaches in New Zealand classrooms.

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Recent citizenship education research in New Zealand

Significant to our understandings of New Zealand students' knowledge, political aspirations and experience of citizenship education is the 2009 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (Schulz et al., 2010). New Zealand has participated in this study twice, in 1971 (with eight other countries) and in 2009 (with 38 countries in total). The 2009 New Zealand data were derived from a survey of 3,979 year 9 (13–14-year-old) students from 146 schools, of which Lang (2010), Hipkins (2012) and Bolstad (2012) undertook secondary analyses. This section examines these data, supplemented with further relevant New Zealand-based studies.

Knowledge

The ICCS study showed that New Zealand students had high levels of civic knowledge, repeating a finding from 1971 data where New Zealand students were found to be among the top performing students in the world for civic knowledge. The 2009 study placed New Zealand students' civic knowledge on a par with those of England, Norway, Spain and the Russian Federation, with only ten of the 38 countries ranked higher than New Zealand (Lang, 2010; Schulz et al., 2010). Classroom-based research in primary schools, however, identifies that the lack of attention to social studies teaching and learning has led to a lack of progression in social studies between years 4 and 8 compared to subjects such as mathematics (NEMP, 2005, 2009).

The ICCS data also identifies a gap between high and low achievers in citizenship knowledge, with girls out-performing boys and European and Asian students out-performing Māori and Pacific students (Lang, 2010). This gap is noted in other international comparative tests New Zealand participates in and reflects characteristics such as parental education, more books in the home and non-immigrant backgrounds (May, Cowles and Lamy, 2013). Classroom-based national evaluation research also confirms this civic knowledge gap (NEMP, 2009), and there is evidence of a difference between students in lower-decile schools being taught locally focused content, while those in higher-decile schools receive a more global education (Wood, 2012, 2013a).

Classroom citizenship education teaching and learning

The ICCS study found that teachers were very confident teaching topics in social studies which related to cultural identities, equality, human rights and the environment. Against this, they had only moderate confidence in teaching legal, political and constitutional topics. New Zealand classrooms were more accommodating of diverse opinions than most others in the study, and a higher percentage of principals, teachers and students valued critical thinking as an important component of citizenship

education than in most ICCS countries. However, there is some evidence that citizenship is not widely recognised by New Zealand teachers as a key goal of the social studies curriculum (Barr, 1996; ERO, 2006; Milligan, Taylor and Wood, 2011), and social studies is not widely recognised by primary students as a curriculum area because it is often integrated with other learning areas (NEMP, 2009). Teachers are also somewhat reluctant to implement more critical and participatory approaches to social studies, with a prevailing focus on teaching factual-based lessons (ERO, 2006; Keown, 1998; Wood, 2013b). Aitken (2005) argues that this is because successive curriculum documentation has done little to elucidate the concept of citizenship.

Political aspirations and action

New Zealand students showed average rates of interest in political and social issues, higher than average rates of expecting to vote in national elections in the future (84%), but lower rates of expected adult participation in political activities, such as joining a political party (49%), just below the ICCS average of 50% (Schulz et al., 2010). Just over half of students surveyed felt they had a good understanding of political issues. However, they had much lower levels of self-confidence: only 39% believed that their opinions were worth listening to (Hipkins, 2012). These low levels of political efficacy for New Zealand young people are confirmed in other studies (e.g. Wood, Taylor and Aitken, 2013).

New Zealand students ranked among the highest in the 38 countries for participation in community volunteering, collecting money, and belonging to a cultural organisation or political party/union. However, they had significantly lower involvement in environmental and human rights organisations (7%) and campaigns for an issue (14%) than those in other countries in the study. Qualitative studies confirm that New Zealand children and young people hold considerable interest in a wide range of contemporary social and political issues, often centred on their own schools, communities and regions (Hayward, 2012; Tayor, Urry and Burgess, 2012; Wood, 2014). Young people's citizenship responses to these issues are often undertaken in small, everyday ways, such as conserving water, which often fly beneath the radar of teacher and adult attention (Wood, 2014).

A rather mixed picture of citizenship education in New Zealand classrooms emerges from these findings. There is some evidence of strong teaching and learning that encourages critically active citizenship, especially in high schools, and the 2013 introduction of 'social action' NCEA achievement standards has opened up potential for further student citizenship action in schools (Taylor, Atkins and Wood, forthcoming).

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However, there are lower levels of shared understandings and consistency in citizenship education across New Zealand's schools, with a big gap between high and low achievers, partly stimulated by the undervaluing of social studies as a site for citizenship (Wendt Samu, 1998). Of particular concern are the lower levels of students' political efficacy and knowledge of political institutions and processes (civics). In the final section we propose a set of approaches that could serve to address these gaps and support children and young people's ability to participate in, interact with and shape their communities and society.

A framework for critical, active citizenship education

This section draws on international research findings which emphasise the importance of critically active approaches to citizenship education. We argue that four dimensions of citizenship education together form the building blocks for the type of citizenship education that has the potential to shape critical, informed and active citizens, both now and in the future.

First, effective citizenship education needs to be underpinned by *flexible, open and inclusive understandings of how citizenship is constituted*, who belongs in our diverse nation and how people can participate. This principle directly critiques many citizenship frameworks employed by government and non-government organisations, which are essentially normative in their aim of creating a certain type of narrowly defined compliant, neo-liberal and conforming citizen (Kennelly and Llewellyn, 2011). In contrast, we argue that citizenship is experienced and lived by young people in multiple and diverse ways and therefore we need frameworks which include, rather than exclude, such diverse expressions. More inclusive and flexible notions of citizenship are needed which include the ability for all members of society to participate equally and achieve recognition, and which more explicitly recognise the diversity of expressions and understandings of citizenship (Lister, 2007). For New Zealand this means a critical understanding of our colonial past, which has frequently served to exclude and minimise the citizenship rights of Māori, and, more recently, other ethnic minorities (Liu et al., 2005). An inclusive citizenship understanding also encompasses diverse forms of citizen participation which go beyond traditional political expressions (such as voting or joining political parties) to include non-traditional and post-traditional expressions of participation (ECPR,

2004), as well as attending to those who lack the status of citizens (Roseneil, 2013).

Second, effective citizenship education requires considerable *knowledge of the complexity of society and the contested nature of social issues.* If citizenship education is concerned with the practice of living and making decisions as individuals and groups, then acknowledging the multiple values and perspectives that are represented in society is essential (Barr, 1998). Thus, the very nature of society requires the presentation of a less ordered and less certain world. Citizenship education therefore needs to be taught in a way that embraces the contested nature of social issues (Hess, 2009). This then necessitates a classroom climate of criticality and care, in which the opinions of children and young people are valued and multiple perspectives are heard. Classrooms that are taught in this way have been found to also enhance greater civic engagement. Such classrooms actively follow current events, discuss problems in communities and ways to respond, promote active dialogue and discuss controversial issues, expose students to civic role models and study issues which matter to them (Hess, 2009; Kahne and Sporte, 2008; Kahne and Westheimer, 2006; Schulz et al., 2010).

Third, effective citizenship education requires *critical links to real world social issues.* Such issues need to be ones that young people can engage with and that have significance to their worlds, and worlds beyond. The significance of young people's experiences of places, communities and local issues in shaping their citizenship actions and dispositions is well established (Harris and Wyn, 2009; Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007; Wood, 2014). Local experiences and knowledge also significantly influence young people's interest in social issues and the extent to which they are informed about current issues. Research has shown that students are more politically motivated by issues which have a direct relevance to their lives and are situated in the 'micro-politics' of their local communities (Harris and Wyn, 2009). This presents a key challenge to educators to allow space for students' interests to form an integral component of citizenship learning, as well as to enable authentic engagement with communities to which they belong.

Finally, effective citizenship education requires *active responses.* When young people participate in more active forms of citizenship learning, this results in stronger patterns of future civic participation. Kahne and Sporte (2008) found that offering active citizenship opportunities that focused directly on civic and political issues and ways to act in school had a significant impact in fostering students' commitments to civic participation, even when controlling for prior civic commitments. Importantly, this study also found that students were more likely to express higher levels of commitment to civic participation when they saw examples of neighbours dealing with community problems, and when they felt supported and looked after in their communities. This highlights the importance of commitment to positive citizenship experiences by whole communities, not just schools. Research also confirms that more active forms of citizenship learning lead to greater levels of political agency in students during school and evidence of greater future engagement in citizen actions (McFarland and Thomas, 2006).

> The development of an active and critically informed citizenry begins with the valuing of young citizens and the provision of authentic, democratic opportunities for them to practise citizenship during their school years.

Conclusion

In plural societies such as New Zealand, it is unlikely that complete agreement will ever be reached on the kinds of citizens we want education to shape; nor can we escape the normativity that any citizen-ship education project entails (Kennelly and Llewellyn, 2011). Citizenship education policy will inevitably inherit an array of contested concepts and 'a plurality of competing and contradictory philosophical ideals and political models of citizenship' (Frazer, 2008, p.282). Our socio-historical analysis of New Zealand's citizenship education through social studies reveals such ideological tensions, which have largely been addressed by trying to meet a variety of political ends: for example, by combining notions of excellence, economic productivity and equity within a single aim (Mutch, 2013). This has led to a lack of clarity in citizenship education in New Zealand policy and practice, presenting a number of challenges to educators who are charged with interpreting and meeting the aims of these competing agendas of citizenship education in New Zealand, as well as to policymakers who attempt to navigate this contested space.

In our view there is a strong case for a 'critically active' form of citizenship education. As we have highlighted, international research evidence strongly points to this approach if we are to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse democracy. Such an approach requires flexible, plural and inclusive understandings of how citizenship is constituted and a deep knowledge of the complexity of society and social issues. Further, approaches which have links to real-world social issues, which build upon the current understandings that children and young people have, and that enable active responses are far more likely to have a long-term impact on citizen formation than learning facts about politics and government. This is

not to suggest, however, that there is one standardised blueprint for creating 'critically active' citizens in education contexts. Instead, the principles we have advanced require further creativity and critical engagement to enable communities to navigate differences in societal visions.

How such critically active approaches could be nurtured is an open question. We have shown that social studies education at years 1–13 holds considerable potential to provide a consistent 'backbone' of citizenship education throughout schooling (Aitken, 2005; McGee, 1998), and that New Zealand social studies classrooms are recognised internationally to have high levels of critical awareness and an open classroom climate (Schulz et al., 2010). However, the status of primary and senior secondary social studies needs elevation if this potential is to be realised (ERO, 2006; Mutch, 2013). Further, clarity about the significance and role of social studies in developing citizenship education aims is also needed (Bolstad, 2012).

The development of an active and critically informed citizenry begins with the valuing of young citizens and the provision of authentic, democratic opportunities for them to practise citizenship during their school years. This requires collaborative, whole-of-government and cross-sector approaches to supporting the existing educational expertise within schools and informal learning contexts, and opportunities for listening across difference about the kind of citizenship education we want for our young citizens. The task ahead is not to erase difference in the name of cohesion or consensus, but to consider what clarity might be achieved across multiple visions for critical, active citizenship education in this country. In the spirit of conversation, we have offered a critically active orientation as a way ahead, in the full knowledge that, ultimately, citizenship education must be judged by the society it produces (Osler and Starkey, 2005).

1 We recognise the limitations of any definition of these terms. For further definitions, including 'political literacy', see the Civics, Citizenship and Political Literacy Working Group: http://nzpsa.com/civics-citizenship-and-political-literacy.

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