

To: Committee Secretary

Joint Standing Committee of Electoral Matters

Re: civics education

Background

Peter Leverenz

**Former principal of Clare High School, Nuriootpa High School
Hallett Cove School.**

**Former Project Officer for Australian Studies in the SACE 1992-
2008**

Former Curriculum Officer at DECS SA for HASS

**Teacher of Australian Studies and History, Politics, Philosophy
and English at Norwood/Morialta High, Adelaide High, Risdon
Park High and Banksia Park High.**

**My comments refer to civics education in schools which has
been lost in the national curriculum compared to similar
subjects in Europe and the USA/Canada.**

What is civics?

**If we assume that democracy cannot be taken for granted, and
that there has been a trend to authoritarian leadership in the
USA, Turkey, Russia, Belize, Israel, and Hungary in recent
times, the need for Civics education is critical to maintain and
improve our democracy. If the dark forces of the internet who
promote misleading information and a lack of critical analyses
results, coupled with apathy, our once great democracy will
wither on the vine as others before them.**

Encounters on Education, Volume 4, Fall 2003pp1-10

“Citizenship education: Theory, research and practice Daniel Schugurensky and John P. Myers Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto which is a collaborative effort of Encounters on Education and the Citizenship Education Research Network (CERN). The Citizenship Education Research Network was created in 1998 to provide a forum for researchers, policy makers and practitioners in the field of citizenship education. Although CERN originated in Canada (and is affiliated with the Canadian Society for Studies in Education), it is pertinent to note that many of its members conduct international research, and that its international membership has expanded in the last two years. In this context, we are very pleased that these papers are published in Encounters on Education, a trilingual journal that aims at generating a dialogue among education researchers from Canada, Spain and Latin America. Citizenship education is a vast field that includes a wide range of philosophical, political and ideological perspectives, and of pedagogical approaches, goals and practices. At the most abstract level of discourse, there is a general consensus that the main purpose of citizenship education is the development of good democratic citizens. In terms of implementation, which includes educational policies, curriculum development and pedagogical strategies, this purpose is expressed in different ways. Indeed, like other educational fields, citizenship education has conservative and progressive orientations. Citizenship education can be used as a tool for maintaining the status quo, but also for empowering individuals and groups to struggle for emancipatory change. While citizenship education practices are situated somewhere along a continuum between these two orientations, they tend to gravitate towards one or the other.

The conservative orientation to citizenship education privileges the reproduction of the existing socio-economic order. From this point of view, capitalism and democracy are perfect complements and it would be impossible to conceive of one without the other. Among its purposes are instilling national loyalty, obedience to authority, voluntary service and the assimilation of immigrants. In terms of content, conservative citizenship education deals primarily with national narratives, historical and geographical facts, and the functioning of government institutions. From this perspective, citizenship education should accept existing social structures, develop moral character and ensure social cohesion. Good citizens are conceptualized as good producers, good consumers, and good patriots. Representative democracy is the ultimate model, and voting is the most important expression of citizen participation.

The progressive orientation to citizenship education privileges societal transformation and social justice. This tradition identifies an inherent tension between capitalism and democracy, as the former generates inequalities and exclusion, and the latter attempts to reduce them. Among its purposes are to nurture cosmopolitanism, critical analysis, political engagement and cross-cultural respect and understanding. Citizenship education should be primarily concerned with emancipation, which implies the development of active, informed and critical citizens who can participate effectively in civic life and in the affairs of the state. From this perspective, citizenship education should examine gender, race and class structures, promote social justice and diversity, and prepare citizens for inclusive political processes of deliberation and decision-making. Good citizens are conceptualized as compassionate, politically engaged, concerned for social justice and the environment, tolerant of others, willing and able to dialogue, and active participants in public life. Following the insights of feminism and participatory democracy, citizenship should recognize private as well as public activities, and democracy

should include greater public participation in decision making than casting a vote every four years. In the progressive orientation, representative and participatory democracy can and should complement each other, and citizens' main task is to further democratize our imperfect democracies.

In every community there are competing proposals about the meaning of citizenship, the qualities of a good citizen, the characteristics of the good society, and the strategies to move toward such a society. These competing proposals inform different conceptions of what citizenship education ought to be. Given this situation, policy makers, researchers and citizenship educators will continue to face political, ethical and pedagogical choices. These choices will be the subject of passionate debates and dialogues, agreements and disagreements. In the spirit of contributing to this conversation, we would like to advance seven propositions for citizenship education in the twenty-first century. These propositions attempt to bring together some of the concerns, visions and strategies that are being discussed by progressive citizenship educators around the world.

"Proposals for twenty-first century citizenship education. My additions are in Berlin

script :

1 From passive to Active Citizenship The first proposition is that citizenship education should not only promote passive citizenship (most frequently expressed in the uncritical acquisition of information about historical, legal and institutional facts), but also active citizenship, which is about revitalizing democratic public life, including school life. The development of informed citizens is a necessary but insufficient condition for the development of democratic societies. Citizenship education should nurture well-informed citizens who are also caring, responsible and engaged, and have critical thinking skills. Promoting active citizenship also implies expanding current programs of community service, so that they include not only charitable activities and volunteer work, but also active involvement with democratic institutions, with political proposals and with contemporary public dialogues.

For example , we included community service for all students at Clare High in the Middle School, We had a Youth Voice committee which put submissions to School Council and Local Government about things to do for teenagers in the local country town. Social workers ran sessions on mental health, suicide, self -harm, positive thinking and so on. At Norwood/Morialta we had a Youth Parliament elected by students with the Electoral Commission running the elections and they presented proposals to School Council, and Local Government. A Youth parliament for the Environment was formed and went to Canberra for a national conference. Recycling at school was set up, the grounds were improved via submissions to the Grounds Committee of parents and teachers

2 KNOWLEDGE of the laws that effect them, law makers, breakers and enforcers9 police roles,courts), the levels of government and their differing roles, how to get new laws and change old ones, examples of historical changes to laws and punishments(enjoyed by middle school students!!

3 Skills of decision making, issue analysis , critical thinking, and compromises.

AT Norwood Morialta and Adelaide High, students learned various thinking models like De Bonos PMI and Thinking Hats, and applied them to theoretical issues such as a mock proposal to build a bridge to Kangaroo Island. They would look at positives, minuses, creative approaches, economic costs, impact on the environment , impact on tourism and more, and work in groups to present their responses to the class and others. In Australian

Studies, a compulsory subject in year 11, we examined real issues using a 5 step model and present their conclusions to the class and in written form.

4 From national citizenship to planetary/ecological citizenship The next proposition is that citizenship education should foster allegiance to the Earth as a single community. This does not mean to ignore the relevance of national identity and sovereignty, particularly in the current context of neoliberal globalization, neocolonial dynamics and unilateralism. However, we should also consider that important issues such as peace, human rights and environmental degradation are global in scope and must be addressed collectively and cooperatively. A planetary citizenship education within an ecological context recognizes our finite resources, raises awareness about first world over-consumption of non-renewable resources, and addresses the race to the bottom in terms of corporate environmental behaviour and government policies (e.g. the rejection of the Kyoto accord). This education also stresses the centrality of universal human rights as an inherent aspect of citizenship and strengthening international institutions like the United Nations. From recognizing cultural diversity to fostering intercultural awareness.

At Norwood and Adelaide Highs, Anti -racism seminars and multicultural week were imbedded in the curriculum. First nations Week was in most schools.

5 promoting democracy in spheres other than parliaments:

Banksia had a Staff Council to make decisions. Norwood, Clare and Adelaide had useful youth parliaments/SRC governments. But they suggested families, businesses, unions..

In conclusion

My submission is that there needs to be a Civics subject in schools which includes knowledge of laws, political systems and our history of Democracy. Some of the aspects of our democracy include universal suffrage and compulsory voting, women receiving the vote in the 1894 (SA) and early 20th century Australia.

This subject shouldn't just be transmission, be a pedagogy of active involvement in democratic processes at school and in society. Thinking skills such as decision making, critical analysis of texts/media, debates, public speaking, podcasts, media forums, and media marking techniques and skills are all essential to be active citizens in our democracy.

Active citizenship through youth parliaments/ media forums and podcasts to practice skills is also essential.

Citizenship education is a whole school approach and a leader in the school is needed to organise community service, special weeks and days, promote school engagement in the community through multi media and develop youth parliaments.

The writers talk of conservative and progressive approaches to this area of the curriculum.

DO NOT BE AFRAID OF TEACHER INDOCTRINATION or radical students. The students come from all perspectives and can handle themselves well I have found and love to be involved.

We have reached a turning point of youth disengagement with elderly politicians. Time to engage them in our democracy before they succumb to dictators empty rhetoric.

Peter Leverenz

29/4/24