**Civics and Citizenship Education re-imagined as a central focus of the school curriculum**

***The following is the second part of a submission sent to the Minister for Education, QCAA, Education Queensland and QCT in mid-2015.*** *The first part suggests**there is and has for many years been a crisis in civics and citizenship education (CCE), and that the implementation of the new national curriculum in CCE will not necessarily increase the possibility of fulfilling the key goal of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008) to support active and informed citizenship. The submission goes on to say that the concerns of our association (the Social Educators Association of Queensland) cover teacher expertise, the status of the subject, its elective nature in Years 9-10 and the senior pathways for the subject. However, we end the submission with suggestions for a new way forward.*

SEAQ believes that the **national goals for schooling should drive the curriculum**, and that active and informed citizenship should therefore be a focal point in the development of a school's curriculum planning, instead of being seen as "a minor irrelevance" by schools (Quote from participant in PD session.)

* At the moment it seems that each discipline focuses on the goals of 'successful learner' and 'confident and creative individual' without considering them as necessarily fundamental to the third goal of enabling students to be 'active and informed citizens'. Also, if learners have a chance to discuss social issues, each discipline does this in isolation, when such issues must always be considered through multiple disciplinary lenses.
* We find that the student leadership program in many schools is divorced from the curriculum, often tokenistic and not inclusive, when it should be the breeding ground for talent, enterprise, civic initiative and school governance by all students in all parts of school life.
* There is also an argument that a whole-school focus on civic concepts such as rights balanced with responsibilities and the nature of the common good, would be useful to promote student engagement. If teachers and students were taught to use and recognize explicit civics language, it could be reasonably expected that issues of behaviour management might be reduced.Disengaged youth may be inspired by actions they take to resolve issues.

We understand the arguments of the crowded curriculum, but it is also our understanding that the content demands of social science subjects are preventing many teachers from finding time for discussion of issues**,** the building of deep understandings or development of skills as **required by the Achievement Standards**. Development of civic skills of decision-making, problem-solving, negotiation, compromise, mediating differences, and presenting evidence-based arguments all need much practice that can only occur during analysis and discussion of issues. If this does not happen at school, where will citizens learn these skills? Therefore, the question arises of when and how this can occur.

We would suggest that, with a whole-school focus on active and informed citizenship, the theoretical knowledge of civics may be taught in twenty hours, but the requirement for inquiry into and discussion of civic issues might be seen as a **part of a larger package** involving most curriculum areas as well as possibilities for taking action on issues within and beyond the school. With such a reach into the wider formal curriculum, plus the informal and extra-curriculum areas, CCE will provide relevance for students and opportunities to practise authentic citizenship.

We are aware that the *Shape of Australian Curriculum* document stated that "*rich and systematic engagement with a discipline-based curriculum ... can form the bases not only of specialised vocational success, but also of confident and knowledgeable civic activity*" . However, it goes on to say that "*rather than being self-contained or fixed, disciplines are interconnected, dynamic and growing, and a discipline-based curriculum allows for cross-disciplinary learning that broadens and enriches each student's learning*" (p.11.) QCAA has explored the practical issues associated with integrating Australian Curriculum learning areas and subjects through its occasional paper on ‘purposefully connected curriculum’ (Nayler, 2014, at [https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/p\_10/ac\_enact\_ac\_paper.pdf).](https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/p_10/ac_enact_ac_paper.pdf%29.%20%20)Much more needs to be done to support Queensland teachers to plan and teach in this way. We would like to suggest that the Civics and Citizenship curriculum provides an avenue for such valuable 21st century learning.

Contemporary issues such as food security (geography, science, economics and business, technology) or the influence of social media (English, the arts, technology, HPE) could be studied from a discipline perspective and then debated in a cross-disciplinary way, using civics methods such as a class-parliament, parliamentary committee inquiry (as in Parliamentary Education Office role-plays), or a mock national/international summit,as a way of involving many students, which would enable them to practice the skills mentioned above. This would involve whole-school planning and the use of curriculum time and discretionary time, but could be planned for special days (e.g. significant national or UN days) or especially for end of term, would not necessarily involve assessment, but yet be expressly fulfilling the national goals, and likely to make students feel relevance in their studies and commitment to their society. Student leadership and collaboration would be necessary components of such activities.

It might also be recognised that such a proposal also helps to fulfil the requirements of some general capabilities, such as Personal and Social Development (*making responsible decisions, working effectively in teams.... developing leadership skills*) and Ethical Understanding (... *fostering personal values and attributes such as honesty, resilience, empathy and respect for others, and the capacity to act with ethical integrity*).

The reasoning for our proposal is based on the Mellor and Meiers QCT Digest article mentioned in the references below ("*the provision of opportunity to practice civic competencies is essential for effective citizenship education*" and additionally, "*The best learning outcomes are achieved when these opportunities can be explicitly linked to a broader civic knowledge that has been taught in a civics class*")p.9. Recommendations of other reviews concur, such as that of the Whitlam Institute (2009, p.20) ("*that all civics education curricula incorporate action-based learning"*).

It should not be thought that what we are suggesting is unachievable. The QCT Digest article outlines five pages titled "Active Citizenship in Schools" (pp 11-15) which **describe case studies** in *Discovering Democracy in Action: Implementing the Program,* which reported a range of learning activities associated with active citizenship. The authors say (p.16) that "*it should be noted that the implementation of many of these programs did not require significant changes to the way the school was organised. ..... They affirm that developing active citizens is an important and legitimate function for schools*."

We think that our proposal also reflects what **AITSL outlines in its Learning Frontiers program**, where they ask "*Can we give all young people in school the chance to grapple with the complex challenges they will face as 21st century citizens, employees, entrepreneurs?"* The four design principles of a Learning Frontiers program for better student engagement with learning are that it be *co-created, personal, connected and integrated.* They say that such learning "*connects with and uses real-world contexts and contemporary issues, and is permeable to the rich resources available in the community and the wider world*". <http://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/professional_practices_increase_student_engagement_learning.pdf?sfvrsn=2>.

We recognise that there is no point in us proposing these ideas to teachers without significant system changes. As AITSL is pointing out, Principals and school leaders will need to rethink and re-orient their school planning. Whole school planning and co-ordination are necessary conditions.

If we are serious about achieving national goals for the education of young Australians then we must provide them with deep specialised learning, but we must also think differently about how to provide them with both an opportunity to develop holistic views on issues and the means to make serious social decisions as citizens now and for the future. **We urge you to think about the possible role of Civics and Citizenship as a vibrant centre of the academic and civic life of our schools**.

**We therefore recommend that efforts be made to:**

* enable provision for widely targeted professional learning in CCE for teachers, so that there will be at least one specialist in each school;
* enlighten principals and school leaders on the educational benefits for schools of a new style holistic plan that is driven by the national goals;
* enable provision for schools to develop such co-coordinated plans which cover formal, informal and co-curricular aspects of the curriculum.

SEAQ believes that the present is a timely period to consider such changes while there is a hiatus before full-scale implementation of CCE. We will of course provide professional learning for teachers to the best of our ability, but that is limited.We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission with you.

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