Young People and Social Inclusion: Challenges for Teachers

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Abstract

The Cronulla riots were a wake-up call for Australia. With a booming economy and an assertive government, the violence at Cronulla was a stark reminder that nations have to be made and remade culturally, as well as economically. An identity as citizen is as important as an identity as worker in forming sustainable imagined communities that can transcend and ameliorate socio-cultural divisions and conflicts. Yet being a citizen means more than simply belonging to a community. It means using power responsibly to further community (collective) action in pursuit of preferred goals.

This paper examines the changing context of skill-building for work and citizenship in Australia. It highlights the role of schools and teachers in this learning, and the way lifelong learning reforms are now reconfiguring these roles. My main argument is that Australia has unfinished business in 'building skills for work and citizenship'. Reform since the mid-1980s has emphasised skills for work but forgotten to consider how people develop skills for citizenship.

Being a worker-citizen

Education as a social institution developed as an instrument of government to manage populations and security within a given jurisdiction. The primary goal of schooling has been to prepare young people for productive and responsible adult lives as worker-citizens. The consequential goal related to security used this shaping of selves to limit possibilities of violent civil conflict arising as a result of religion or other sectional mobilisations.

This skill-building was tensioned by the need to induct young people into the practices of power that sustain capitalism and democracy. Schooling skilled and sorted the population for future work roles that would be mostly governed hierarchically through employment contracts. It also disciplined individuals in ways of knowing, interacting with others and using power horizontally, as equal and responsible decision makers in citizen-communities. Participation in community is a feature of both political regimes. It appears as teamwork in workplaces and as citizen action in governance.

Cronulla shocked Australia because it represented a breakdown in the social management of civil conflict. The violence on the beach challenged views about what it meant to be Australian. It showed that public rights and responsibilities associated with using public space were patterned by religious-ethnic identification. It highlighted that some young people were not using power – their power of collective action – in a responsible way.

Yet the main response to Cronulla seems to have been in learning for work. The Commonwealth and State governments have endorsed an expansion of technical education, plus sweeteners (eg. toolboxes, HECS in TAFE). This response recognises that access to work is a key aspect of community building and therefore a legitimate response to social inclusion. Yet there has been less action on tackling the development of citizenship skills.

Citizenship skills

The development of citizenship skills is a critical dimension, alongside building skills for work, in the formation of sustainable communities. Citizenship is a constraint on the exercise of power through collective action. Citizenship is a 'power to act' in a certain capacity, in particular contexts, in ways that can enhance the individual and society. It is an institutionalisation of ethical practices that are positively oriented towards the citizen-community and the public good, and that limit mobilisations on the basis of sectional interests, like religious or ethnic identifications.

Citizenship underpins the formation of collective agency and its form of state or decision-making body, which can legitimately act on behalf of the people and for the public good. This collective agency exercises this authority because its actions rest on citizen action, involving equal participation within rule-governed decision-making processes. The legitimacy of governance by states, their decision-making processes and the democratic politics that sustain them are undercut when people's opinions about what should be done by or within the collective agency are excluded.

Learning citizenship skills is a precondition for exercising power responsibly in acting as a citizen. This learning requires the development of civic knowledge that it is both lawful and appropriate for citizens to act in these ways. Citizenship also depends upon the possession of civic competence and the development of a disposition to engage as a citizen in the responsible use of power. These are all outcomes of civic learning in the broadest sense.

Yet the exercise of citizenship skills is determined by the terms and conditions within communities. The way citizenship skills are learned, and the way citizen action is endorsed and authorised, influences the construction of I-we and I-other identities. It enables and constrains ethical obligations. It also shapes the capability of decision-making processes to realise legitimate actions and outcomes.

Contexts for building skills for work and citizenship

The terms and conditions for exercising and building citizenship skills within Australia have shifted in significant ways since the 1980s. In response to global economic pressures, the 'nation-building state changed its mind' (Pusey, 1992) and embarked on reforms that privileged building skills for work over skills for citizenship.

For most of the 20th century, public authorities governed skill building by defining inputs that balanced learning for work and citizenship. Specification of curriculum and assessment, the enculturation of teachers and the ethics of professional practice, and the specification of terms and conditions of teachers' work and workplaces, framed the teaching process.

Teaching and learning operated through a certain 'kind of love' within authority relations (Metcalf & Game, 2006). This 'pastoral pedagogy' gave:

> *… individuals intense pedagogic attention, while applying regular norms and providing common resources … [which] are … heavily dependent on a centralised institutional capacity for close pedagogic attention, statistical normalisation, expert analysis and pastoral concern (Meredyth, 1998).*

The priority given to this 'input learning' downplayed the significance of 'in-place learning' that resulted from young people's generalised participation in schooling. Schools, TAFE institutes and universities provided socially distributed learning opportunities to particular individuals and groups, which established foundational competence for occupational choices.

Citizenship skills were mostly developed through in-place learning. They were a by-product of the process of pastoral pedagogy, rather than an outcome of specific instruction. The capacities and disposition for citizen-action were not easily codified as agreed inputs and outcomes.

Since the 1980s this institutionalisation of skill building has shifted. Learning is endorsed as a foundational competence required by citizens, communities and societies on a global scale (Kuhn, 2007). This 'new deal' is with a 'ruthless economy'. It is underpinned by governance practices that privilege industry voice relative to that of the citizen-community. Its message is 'learn or be damned' (Kuhn & Sultana, 2006).

The new deal prioritises workforce development for a competitive global economy. In-place learning is endorsed and recognised as a significant contributor to workforce skills and a basis for innovation that can be commercialised for profit. Social inclusion is its justification, which identifies the 'citizen' as a category of stakeholder. They are users or beneficiaries, consumers with consumption interests in economic development, rather than political actors with democratic rights and responsibilities (Seddon, 2007).

These practices that generalise learning across the life-course cut across the established purposes and priorities of schooling. Schooling is no longer seen as a distinct skill-building enclave to support the young, but has been put to service the economy. The redesign of schooling to support skill-building for people of all ages has been largely driven through re-regulation of inputs. Outcomes-based assessment is endorsed, alongside reoriented curriculum, redefined terms and conditions of teachers' work and the re-culturing of teachers.

The redesign of in-place learning within schooling is more intractable because it depends upon the social relations that construct cultural spaces for teaching-learning work. It has been tackled by localising learning. Lifelong learning policy reforms have driven increased links with industry (particularly in TAFE, but also universities and schools) and by re-locating some learners into learning spaces beyond schooling. These diversified learning spaces reconfigure pastoral pedagogy so that its cultural embrace is framed by norms enacted through localised power relations rather than the norms of rule-governed public service.

These localised learning spaces each sustain a mix of in-put and in-place learning. What is learned is constituted by the social relations

of teaching-learning and the terms and conditions that mediate these relations through everyday interactions: basic skills for the young, differentiated skilling for the innovation and service economies, and simple social skills to support inclusion of the disaffected and disadvantaged. These interactions enact practices of power that are the in-place curriculum that inducts learners into norms of conduct.

Learning in cafés

The Western District Social Partnership was formed as part of a state government policy initiative. It aimed to support young people in their transition from school to working life, with a particular emphasis on those who had fallen through the educational network, and were at risk of social disadvantage and isolation.

The café is located on the foreshore of a coastal town. Its curved balcony and big windows look across the inlet towards a steelworks and oil refinery (both subject to workforce reductions). The training café was developed by the local council in an attempt to revitalise the area's economy and offer skills training to young people in a region with above average unemployment. The café was established, with modest funding from the State Government, to conduct a 15-week project with 30 participants. It now employs people of all ages (in line with the Shire's casual employment guidelines). Most are under 25. They serve an average of 380 people per day. At any time there are approximately 20 training participants, both 'back and front of house'.

Most participants are sourced from the long-term unemployed in the region. There are two Schools Based New Apprenticeship positions (kitchen operations) with one designated for intellectually or physically disabled participants. The café can accommodate up to 15 groups at a time from skills employment networks and students from the local TAFE who seek training in a practical working environment, rather than an institutional setting. Courses include Certificates 1–3 in Food Handling and Hospitality, Bar Tending, Occupational Health and Safety and Coffee Making, as well as the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning.

The six-month courses include a written component and an exam, which is facilitated by one of several accredited trainers who work in the café, along with four professional chefs. None of the students are directly involved in cooking. They make and serve coffee, prepare food and clean up. The menu and its assembly is the preserve of the chefs, who are not required to provide training to the participants and may be seen as guides to be observed. The trainers encourage learners' participation. Limited local transport makes participation difficult for some, but there is good demand for places and returnee participation is not encouraged. After the six months, trainees have their hours reduced or are 'let go'. The café is acknowledged as an outstanding success. Participants speak of being 'put on their feet'. One trainee noted:

> *You gain hands-on experience which is better than doing mostly theory at TAFE. While I've been here, I've learnt that you can't do it all by yourself, when you start, it's an I-thing. 'I want to do this Ö' and you soon realise, if you want it done quickly and well, you have to work as a team. Personal presentation is important. You learn that there are ways of dealing with people. Now, when I'm a customer in places like this, I can see what they're doing, I can say, 'I know this'.*

This learning space is a commercial kitchen. It highlights the way services leading to employment in the hospitality industry is the primary, tangible goal of training programs. Yet the production and consumption of food provides a window on what is also being learned in these spaces.

The social practices of dealing with food codify social norms and relationships, establishing hierarchies, patterns of inclusion and exclusion and boundaries across which transactions occur. The learning subject being formed in these cafés is marked by these discursive practices. What is transacted is food and also the performance of service. The learners learn to perform the bonhomie, the emotional and symbolic work that distinguishes the servant from those who are served, those who eat in restaurants and those who work in them. Consumption frames the identities and behaviours of both learners who wait (at tables) and those they serve as customers.

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Both cafés offer credentialed vocational training. Yet the credential and training on which its award is based, seems insignificant compared to other pastoral, emotional, rehabilitative and relational learning that is going on. The training relationship is not centred on a teacher as source and learner as subaltern subject, but entails learning through participation that embraces all who use the sites. The emphasis is more on learning to be (and be in relationship), than to know. It is realised through learning relationships that respect difference and embody care.

While such learning is seductively soft compared to training imperatives that stress control and the attainment of pre-specified objectives, it also works against the affirmation of learning subjects as knowers with the capacity to exercise power based on their authority as knowers. They can train to wait but not design menus or be chefs. The pastoral and performative dimensions complement each other, encouraging, disciplining learners towards the sort of service behaviours expected in consumer societies.

Learning spaces like cafés are seen to be particularly relevant to young people who are disengaged from school and a way of addressing skills shortages in areas of economic transition. Yet the kinds of working lives being made available to these young learners at the café are different to those who work at the steelworks and oil refinery. In the industrial sector, strong unionisation, set job tasks and duration persist to a large extent. Those who service the café and consumer society confront the other side of the dual labour market.

The cultural consequences of this dual labour market are contested. Some fear cultural disintegration, which will undercut collective capacity for living shared lives. Yet, both cafés define themselves as actors in the creation of a sense of local identity. Students perform

this agenda, building community with the café clientele and, in turn, sustaining a larger group, a community of consumers who visit the venues to be part of a social milieu as well as to eat. As participants in this consumer partnership they also learn, drawn perhaps to the rehabilitative experience of these cafés and the opportunity to learn how to consume, materially and socially. They learn to be part of a community, to live with others, but not to engage in citizen action. They learn to take up the restricted form of citizenship on offer within lifelong learning regimes.

Learning citizenship?

Lifelong learning reforms are diverse and return a complex mix of benefits to individuals and societies, but they hinge on a regime of power that has disturbed the balance between capitalism and democracy. Practices of power evident in workplace hierarchies have been generalised at the expense of horizontal relations within citizen communities.

The generalisation of managerial prerogative has eroded legitimate contestation in workplaces and communities. The unilateral assertion of managers' 'right to manage', and mobilisation of political correctness and the dismissal of dissent, undercuts citizen action through collective decision making that returns and protects public goods.

Schooling is not exempt from these imperatives. **Teachers' work in a lifelong learning political regime is disciplined by the exercise of hierarchical power through both political correctness in the community and managerial prerogative in workplaces.** These constraints on dissent mean that horizontal practices of power, which are fundamental to citizen action, are less evident within schooling than in the past.

There is a danger here. **When the visibility of citizen practices of power is reduced, the possibility of learning citizenship skills through in-place learning is also reduced**. If teachers model practices of power based on domination-subordination, which is often experienced as bullying and compliance, is it surprising that young people play out bullying practices on the beaches of Cronulla?

As the Civics Expert Group noted:

> *Our system of government relies for its efficacy and legitimacy on an informed citizenry; without active, knowledgeable citizens the forms of democratic representation remain empty; without vigilant, informed citizens there is no check on potential tyranny Ö our democratic values require that every citizen has equal opportunity to participate in the exercise of these rights and responsibilities. Without civic education that democratic ideal is not maintained. (CEG, 1994: 15-16)*

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A brief history of the future is the beguiling title of Oona Strathern's 2007 book which gives an account of how our attitudes towards the future have changed, particularly over the past hundred years. No matter in what field we work now, we must be seriously concerned about the trendlines affecting all aspects of human existence. Observations of the changes that our world is experiencing are provided by the following authors. Hedley Beare

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