

Learning & exploring the concept of Citizenship

By Pam Dudgeon
Abbotsford Primary School



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Centre. Pam is on the SEV executive.

Introduction

Finding out what students' knowledge, skills, understandings of civics and citizenship is an important strategy to further teaching and learning activities. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) states that: "All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens" (p. 8).

The Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship (Curriculum Corporation, 2006) highlight the learning opportunities in the curriculum for the civics and citizenship education domain. This document articulates learning in civics and citizenship at year levels 3, 5, 7 and 9 across three broad areas of Governments and Law, Citizenship in a Democracy and Historical Perspectives.

This article describes such a teaching and learning strategy in civics and citizenship education in a primary school classroom. Abbotsford Primary School is a small inner city Melbourne school with a current enrolment of 87 students. There are four classes at years P-2, years 3/4, years 5/6 and a Bilingual Mandarin P-4, and a range of specialist programs. The school has provided education in the area for over 130 years. Students are predominantly from a Vietnamese and Chinese

background with many living in the nearby high rise public housing estate. A high proportion of Abbotsford students only speak English at school.

Students in grade 5/6 at Abbotsford Primary School were asked a series of questions about citizenship. The 5/6 class comprises of 12 year sixes and 5 grade fives, of which 13 are boys and 4 are girls. They are an enthusiastic group of learners who are keen to develop their knowledge and skills in all areas of the curriculum. They are an absolute delight to teach. Appendix 1 includes the statement of learning for year 5 – Citizenship in a democracy.

This activity was one of the introductory activities to the integrated topic 'The Making of a Nation' across the term. The questions were designed to ascertain student's current understandings of citizenship as well as a reference for future teaching and learning activities.

Student Questions

1. What does the term citizenship mean to you?
2. Do you think citizenship is important?
3. When do you become a citizen?
4. What does citizenship provide you?
5. Are there any disadvantages to citizenship? Why do you say that?
6. Is all citizenship equal? Why do you say that?
7. What other aspects of citizenship do you think are important to discuss or ask questions?
8. Is it important to learn about citizenship?
9. When should people begin to learn about citizenship? Give reasons.

Student responses

The following sample responses provide insight into student current perceptions and understanding, of citizenship.

1. What does the term citizenship mean to you?

- You help other people and do the right things
- Citizenship is when you are part of a community
- Citizenship is when you are a citizen of Australia or other places that you migrate to
- When you are a member of a country
- I think it means being a resident of your country
- I think citizenship means people all around the world sharing and helping others. I think citizenship means that you are part of this country
- Citizenship means someone is part of a country or place
- Being a citizen is to be a part of the community and the country
- You're a local person
- Citizenship: you come from Australia, live in Australia, born in Australia, growing up in Australia

2. Do you think citizenship is important?

- Yes, so that people can be citizens of a country and stay in that place for as long as they want
- Citizenship is important because if you are not a citizen you are not part of a community
- I think citizenship is important because if you are not part of the country you can't vote
- Yes, because when you go over to another country it says on your passport where you're from and it feels good to be part of a country, to know that you are a member
- I think it is important because if you are not a citizen of Australia you won't be able to live here
- Yes, because you have a right to be in your own city or suburb
- Yes, because citizenship is all about you

3. What does citizenship provide you?

- Citizenship provides you with friendship, rights, etc
- You can get a job, get paid by the government and vote
- You can vote and do anything
- Vote and to be an Australian
- Provides you with the right to vote in the country
- Citizenship provides me a vote and I can do stuff I like to do
- Like when you don't work the dole can help and if you're a citizen you can vote. It depends on what country you are a member of
- Citizenship provides you with trust so you can live in Australia. It also provides for you to vote
- A birth certificate, a licence and friends

4. What are your obligations as a citizen?

- Be friendly, look after the environment, and not steal things from others
- You need to follow the rules
- If I am a citizen of the country I have to respect others
- Try to have less pollution in the world
- To do good things and follow the Australian laws
- Go to school and work
- To care for the world, not pollute much and respect others

5. Are there any disadvantages to citizenship?

- Not really, because people respect you and you respect them, and all are happy
- Yes, because in some countries some people force others to vote for a certain person
- There are some disadvantages in Australia like people from other places who have just come over to Australia can't vote
- Yes, because in some countries the government forces people to vote for him/her otherwise they will get killed
- No, I think that there are no disadvantages to being a citizen because you can do what you think is good and everybody does different things

6. Is all citizenship equal?

- No, some citizens are poor and some are rich
- No, because some people might work harder and some might get paid more
- No, because some citizens are poor
- No, because some people like maids have to work for rich people every day and it's not fair and it's kind of like being a slave to me
- No, because some citizens don't have houses, money or food but some have everything
- No, because different countries have different laws
- No, because some other countries have different citizenship
- It is the same for all people
- No, because it depends on the country you are a member of, because they could have laws that are not the same as other countries

What other aspects of citizenship do you think are important to discuss or ask questions?

- Why do some citizens do bad things?
- Why don't some citizens look after their environment and the community?

- I think we need to discuss about poor people and how they need money
- Why's everyone rich and poor?
- Why do people like to live in this environment?
- Voting, because many people who come from other countries haven't voted and don't know the rules.
- Why do people come to Australia?

7. When do you become a citizen?

- When you are older if you want to become a citizen
- You become a citizen when you are eighteen because that's when you can vote and stuff like that
- When I'm eighteen years old I can get citizenship
- You can become a citizen when you come to the country
- You become a citizen when you live in Australia for a long time and don't go back to your country to live
- When you are born you get your citizenship certificate
- 18
- When you get your birth certificate
- When you're born I think

8. Is it important to learn about citizenship?

- Yes, because if you don't learn about citizenship you might grow up to be a bad person
- Yes, because if you don't you won't know how you belong to your country
- Yes, so you know what to do
- Yes, so we know how to be a good citizen
- Yes, so you know how to behave when you grow up
- Yes it is, because if you don't know about it you will not know what's happening and you won't know the rules
- It is important to know about citizenship because as we grow up we know what citizenship means
- Yes, it's important to learn about citizenship because then we have more knowledge about the citizenship of people
- You should learn about citizenship so that you can learn something in your life

9. When should people begin to learn about citizenship?

- You should learn about citizenship in year 5/6 so that you understand it and because when you go to high school and they test you, you will know all about it

- I think people should start learning about citizenship when they are 15 years old because then they are grown up enough
- I think people should learn at primary school because then they will know it well
- I think they should learn about citizenship when they are in grade 5 or 6 - because it would be good to know about citizenship before you go to high school so that you can learn more than waiting for other people to understand what you have already learnt
- I think you should start to learn about citizenship in high school so when you get older you remember it better
- About when you're in primary school because when you're really small you don't really remember stuff

Analysis of student responses

Students had a basic understanding of citizenship and its benefits and obligations. They viewed citizenship positively, as being part of a community and country. They also indicated that it was participatory, i.e. vote, be good, obey laws, needed to be knowledgeable.

Some students realised that citizenship itself does not ensure equality for all citizens. Their concern about discrepancies in income and job status alluded to issues of social justice.

Other students were aware that citizenship benefits and rights vary between countries, and there can be disadvantages to being a citizen in some countries.

All students thought that learning about citizenship was important. Many said learning about citizenship was necessary to be a 'good' and knowledgeable citizen. Some referred to understanding laws and processes as being important to being a good citizen as well.

There was confusion as to when you become a citizen. This could have been influenced by personal experience as a few students spoke of their parents becoming Australian citizens and attending citizenship ceremonies. Also, many connected citizenship with the right to vote. Elections and voting had been extensively covered in term one before the Junior School Council elections and students are knowledgeable on voting criteria in Australia - need to be 18 years of age, an Australian citizen and registered. This also may have led some to believe that this is when you become a citizen. This confusion needs to be addressed.

An interesting anomaly was the common view of citizenship as being a member of a community/society and the perception by some of citizenship at the age of 18. It does lead to the question of how some students view themselves in this 'twilight/limbo' time and needs to be explored and rectified. Many students thought it was important to begin to learn about citizenship at primary school, although a significant number thought it should be later. The age to start learning about citizenship seemed to be related to when students thought you became a citizen.

What was surprising and of concern was that the students who thought citizenship learning should begin post primary school had failed to connect the many current activities within the class and in the wider

school as being citizenship related. More explicit connections will need to be made.

Future directions for learning

This was an introductory activity with a new class and was presented to them as a 'cold' activity with no prior discussion or 'warm up'. The rationale was to establish prior knowledge and understanding. As a result, the following will be implemented to develop student civics and citizenship understanding, skills and dispositions:

- Broaden students understanding of citizenship in general and specifically in relation to them as active citizens now and not perceived as a future event
- Develop students understanding of civic institutions and processes
- Explore the integral relationship between civics and citizenship
- Provide opportunities to develop active citizenship skills and dispositions through a student action project
- Highlight and make explicit links to school based activities that have civics and citizenship action components, for example - Junior School Council, involvement in school policy development and 'going further' activities in integrated studies units.

It should be an interesting and active term. I plan to revisit the original questions and look forward to student responses. Fingers crossed!

References

Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, (2008) Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs.

The Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship, (2006) Curriculum Corporation, Carlton South.

Appendix 1

Extract from Statements of Learning

Year 5 Citizenship in a democracy

Students develop an understanding of their rights and responsibilities and engage with these within their school and community. They investigate the range of ways in which people work together to contribute to civil society and discuss values that can help people resolve differences and achieve consensus. They appreciate the right of others to be different, within the rule of law, and participate in activities that celebrate diversity and support social cohesion. They develop skills to contribute effectively to representative groups in familiar contexts.

Students understand ways in which Australian citizens are influenced by and can influence local, state, national, regional and global decisions, events and movements, including issues of sustainability. They investigate the social and political links between Australia and other countries in the Asia–Pacific region and explore global developments and their potential impact on Australia. They understand that protecting the environment requires that people work together

as citizens and consumers and participate in appropriate actions as environmental stewards or in other civic action to effect positive change.

Students explore different ways in which media and information and communication technologies can portray an event or story and how these can influence citizens' beliefs and actions. They evaluate the range of media and information and communication technologies that active and informed citizens can access.

Teaching about Human Rights

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Introduction

There is no need to convince social education teachers that this area of learning is the very foundation of young people's understanding about themselves and how they and others interact in an ever increasing global world. Social Education, whether it be called Humanities, SOSE or History/Geography/Economics is where young people learn about what it means to be 'socially educated' in the sense of being informed, sensitive and active members of the community.

For many of us as teachers of social education, our thinking about what it actually means to be 'socially educated' is a combination of our own personal dispositions and values, and, the guidance provided by key curriculum documents.

Currently there are three (and soon to be four) curriculum documents that talk about what it means to be 'socially educated'. These documents are:

Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians

Released in December 2008, the Melbourne Declaration describes the current and near future goals in education for young Australians. A 'socially educated' young person is seen as one who is an active and informed citizen believing in a democratic, equitable and just society so ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion. The words "Human Rights" are not mentioned in this document.

See: http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mceetya/melbourne_declaration

Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship

Released in 2006, the Statement describes the knowledge, skills, understandings and capacities that all young Australians should have the opportunity to learn and develop in order to become informed and active citizens. The document focuses on the junctures of the end of years 3,5,7 and 9 and has three broad aspects of Civics and Citizenship – Government and Law, Citizenship in a Democracy, and Historical Perspectives. Socially educated students learn to appreciate the right to be different within a democratic civil society in which courts protect democratic rights and the common good. The words 'Human Rights' are not mentioned in this document.

See: http://www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/_resources/SOL_CivicsCitizenship.pdf

Victorian Essential Learning Standards

The Civics and Citizenship domain asks student to 'consider human rights and social justice issues at local, national and global levels'. A 'socially educated' young person values self, appreciates the uniqueness and diversity of Australia's multicultural society and enacts the values that are important to be an engaged citizen for the future well-being

of societies. So the words 'Human Rights' are explicitly mentioned once in VELS, although this is not the case in other State curriculum frameworks.

See: <http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au>

National Curriculum

After much public consultation, the long awaited national curriculum with four learning areas and a preamble document have not yet been published. Draft versions of the both the History and Preamble documents did not include explicit reference to 'Human Rights'

See: <http://www.ncb.org.au>

Should Human Rights issues be included in curriculum documents?

The above descriptions of the current place of Human Rights in key Australian curriculum documents clearly indicates that the writers of the documents do not see Human Rights as central to a 'socially educated' person. However my reading of all of the above documents indicates that many of the key dimensions of Human Rights are mentioned, for example, social justice, equality, common good but without the actual 'Human Rights' words being included. Why is this? Amnesty International Australia (AIA) believes that most of the above documents lack both a cohesive direction and a convincing rationale. And we believe that a focus on Human Rights Education would provide an overarching framework for defining what it means to be 'socially educated'. The explicit inclusion of the concept of 'Human Rights' is a very useful heading or summary for the many, but unlinked, dimensions that are included in the documents.

Why does the Melbourne Declaration focus on 'economic prosperity', 'productive futures' and the human capital rationale of education and steer away from universal beliefs about Human Rights? One conclusion could be that yet again educational policy is driven by economic imperatives and that curriculum is a social construction representing the prevailing political ideology.

Is there a connection between Human Rights and the goals of Social Education?

What are 'Human Rights'? AIA is in agreement with the 'simple' definition of Human Rights as outlined on the Australian Human Rights Commission website (<http://www.hreoc.gov.au>). Elements of the definitions often include the recognition and respect of people's dignity; a set of moral and legal guidelines that promote and protect a recognition of our values, our identity and ability to ensure an adequate standard of living; the basic standards by which we can identify and measure inequality and fairness, those rights associated with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In summary, Human Rights represent the conditions that people need to flourish.

Human Rights Education is therefore about developing skills, values, dispositions for engagement and understandings of what it means to live with dignity and respect for self and the rights of others. AIA argues that these are attributes of a 'socially educated' person and are therefore central to the teaching of Social Education. In the current VELS framework, the decision to disaggregate the Humanities into the three areas of History, Geography and Economics, is a distraction from the main goals of Social Education although we believe that these disciplines provide useful perspectives into the broader goals of Social Education.

What do we know about the place of Human Rights education in the thinking of teachers?

In 2007 an in house research project for Amnesty International Australian titled 'An investigation of teacher thinking about human rights in 2007 for the delivery of teacher professional learning in 2009 and beyond' was commissioned. Some findings from this report revealed that:

- there is considerable confusion among experienced teachers about the meaning of Human Rights
- many teachers are anxious about their lack of information about Human Rights
- there is a belief by teachers that the absence of explicit references to Human Rights in curriculum frameworks means that Human Rights are not core business for teachers of Social Education.
- issues of Human Rights are not included in most pre-service education programs
- that there is a lack of suitable and useful resources about Human Rights issues
- teachers rate discussions of Human Rights issues very highly as part of broad educational goals.

How can Amnesty International Australia assist you in teaching and learning about Human Rights?

Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of more than 2.2 million people across 150 countries working to promote the observance of all human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards. Amnesty International has approximately 80,000 members in Australia. Human Rights Education is a significant priority for AIA and there is a small team of staff dedicated to assisting teachers and students to learn about and to enact human rights. Our Human Rights Education work with Australian schools builds on our extensive network of over 300 school groups.

The focus of the human rights education team is based on the belief that human rights education has three core elements:

- learning about human rights – this involves knowing and understanding human rights history, laws, concepts and issues
- learning for human rights – means enabling young people to learn the skills needed to take action for human rights
- learning through human rights is about ensuring that the learning environment respects the rights of both teachers and learners, so both can experience the fulfilment of their rights through education.



What are some ways of getting started in teaching and learning about Human Rights in your School?

HUMAN RIGHTS AT SCHOOL



Many schools, principals and individual teachers already include and integrate human rights education into their teaching and learning programs. If

you are thinking about getting started, what might be a useful starting activity?

Questions for discussion

What processes exist in your school for people to express discontent with policies and practices and resolve these issues?

1. How do these processes promote or obstruct recognition of the rights of the people involved?
2. To what extent is the school engaged in actively promoting human rights? For example, supporting social justice campaigns?

Students could:

- write a human rights preamble to the school's mission statement.
- present their findings to a staff and/or School Council meeting.

Taking action to defend someone's human rights need not always be a large-scale international action. Sometimes "thinking local" is a good starting point to discuss human rights issues.

A starting point might be to examine the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), (see www.unicef.org) to establish a benchmark for any investigation. Students might then begin their school based investigation by firstly reflecting on their human rights experiences at school so far in terms of the received curriculum. Students, in groups, could then interview teachers from a range of subject areas with a focus on trying to find out the extent to which human rights issues are a part of the school curriculum.

The curriculum is only one component of the school that might incorporate human rights issues. Students could discuss other aspects of the school that might also consider human rights, for example, school programs, student representation, school policies, school environment and even classroom teaching and learning practices. Some areas for consideration to assess the extent to which the school is consistent with human rights principles, might include policies and practices regarding school uniforms, gender, decision-making, and any other areas of inclusion and exclusion.

What are some useful AIA resources for teaching about Human Rights?

School Action Packs

Each term, AIA produces a student action pack for students to take action to support Human rights. This is a very useful collection of ideas for students to initiate activities, including information about how to establish an AIA school group, topics for discussion, key events and holiday activities. Written in 'kids' speak' the Pack is free and available online at www.amnesty.org.au/schoolaction

AIA Online Newsletter

this is one of our main ways of keeping in touch with teachers across Australia. To receive regular information and updates about resources you can see the link to 'online newsletter' and 'Stay Informed' at www.amnesty.org.au/humanrightstoday OR subscribe by emailing us at hre@amnesty.org.au

'Human Rights today'

Developed by the Curriculum Corporation for AIA for use by teachers and students in years 9 and 10. The resource focuses on issues including – child labour, the rights of indigenous people in Australia, the rights of women and girls, human rights and conflict, taking action for human rights. You can download the online guide and a sample chapter OR you can order the book (\$34.95) from AIA by emailing us at hre@amnesty.org.au

'Human Rights in Focus'

This DVD is pitched at years 9-12, is free and was developed by AI (UK) in 2007. A copy of this DVD has been sent to every secondary school in

Australia, but if you can't find a copy email us at hre@amnesty.org.au
The DVD has three short films: Justice for Dad (impact of Guantanamo Bay on families); Over to You (youth led campaigns); Human Rights Human Wrongs (studio debate with young people discussing human rights concepts).

Right Here, Right Now: Teaching Citizenship through Human Rights

A downloadable resource (years 7-9) linking human rights concepts to everyday experiences, including issues such as identity, diversity, rights and responsibilities. See hre@amnesty.org.au

Resources for Primary teachers

These resources from AI (Ireland) include The Right Start (Human rights for children aged 4-7); Lift Off (for children aged 8-10); Me, You, Everyone (rights and responsibilities for children aged 9-11) Available at AIA, email us hre@amnesty.org.au

Celebrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

A resource pack developed by AI (Ireland) on themes including what is the UDHR, what can be done to make a difference and an action project. There are online support materials including teacher notes and worksheets. Available at AIA, email us hre@amnesty.org.au

Teaching about China, the Olympics and Human Rights

Developed for years 7-10 students to coincide with the 2008 Olympics, however it contains materials of continuing interest, including internet censorship, the history of the Olympics. Available online at hre@amnesty.org.au

Australian Human Rights Commission

<http://www.hrec.gov.au/education> This site has a very wide range of useful teaching and learning resources about Human Rights.

What is AIA planning in 2009?

Human Rights and Poverty

Poverty is a violation of human rights. Every person, everywhere in the world, has a basic right to adequate standards of living. This "Dignity" campaign will focus on the status of indigenous people in Australia compared to other countries. Curriculum resources are being developed aimed at teachers of English, Humanities and Social Education.

Human Rights Act for Australia

Australia is the only liberal democracy without a Human Rights Act (HRA) or similar national human rights protection. The current federal government supports a HRA for Australia and has promised to engage in wide public consultation throughout 2009 about its scope. This campaign has the potential to encourage your students to engage in an active, community-based, yet 'safe' campaign, in other words to actually practice active citizenship. Look at AIA and HRC websites for information, resources and coming events.

Torture and Terror



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Thousands of people have been locked up in secret detention centres, tortured or have disappeared in the "war against terrorism". Here is a controversial issue that senior students in particular can engage with. To what extent can an individual's freedoms be undermined by governments in the pursuit of the 'national interest'?

Stop Violence against Women

Relatives of disappeared and murdered women protest in Mexico City.

Violence against women is the most widespread human rights abuse in the world. To what extent is bullying of girls in our schools a part of this issue?



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What can you do?

Join Amnesty: This is the best way for you, your school, and your family, to be well informed about Human Rights. Become a Human Rights Defender by joining us at www.amnesty.org.au

How can you help us? We would like to hear from you if you have ideas about how we can better assist you and your school in teaching and learning about Human Rights. For example, are there some Human Rights topics that you would like to join with us in developing resources? Would you and your students like to join us in producing our Student Action Packs?

In 2009, AIA is thinking about producing a DVD recording Human Rights activities and practices currently existing in schools. This might include videoing an existing student Amnesty group meeting, talking with students and teachers about Human Rights or videoing a class in action. If you would like to talk with AIA about what you are currently doing in your school about Human Rights Education please contact me on wprior@amnesty.org.au

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