

Chapter 4

“And Its Ghost May Be Heard”: Policy and Practice in Civics and Citizenship Education in Australia Over Two Decades

Murray Print

University of Sydney, Australia

John Buchanan

University of Technology Sydney, Australia

ABSTRACT

Civics and citizenship education is an important factor in many democracies' education programs for its young people. In Australia, civics and citizenship education has an extended history, but has achieved mixed success. This chapter investigates civics and citizenship education in Australia in the past two decades. It focuses in particular on two pivotal events in the development of Australia's civics and citizenship education: discovering democracy and the Australian curriculum civics and citizenship. It explores these initiatives in the context of some of the political developments of the time. The chapter analyzes the factors that contributed to or limited the success of these programs. It also explores implications for other jurisdictions wishing to implement similar programs and initiatives.

SNAPSHOT: DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS?

A recent study (Twenge & Park, 2017) notes today's (richer?) teens are 'adulting' (not our term) more slowly than did their forebears. They less frequently drink, drive, smoke, earn money, socialise without parents, or have (unprotected) sex. Various motives and causes have been ascribed to such conduct: irresponsibility, education, virtue, laziness, sense of security, life expectancy, social isolation; all likely have some purchase on truth. Some are welcome; for their wellbeing and ours, we want (young) people not to smoke or drink-drive. Education campaign contributions here, as with unsafe sex, are undeniable.

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In the shadows behind this, though, might another cause be lurking? Might it be that young people feel ‘beaten by the system’ – that resistance is futile? Certainly, technology has made driving offences more detectable, and licence tests are now more rigorous. Dramatic scare campaigns at school may have driven young people from driving altogether, rather than driving more prudently. (Nevertheless, the young retain some rebellion in reserve; some still phone and drive.) Reasons for acquiescence may include: device- and technology-mediated scope for disempowerment, isolation, scrutiny and (perceived) inferiority; ‘helicopter parenting’; or despair about home ownership. Have we terrorised or disenfranchised the revolutionary baby boomers’ grandchildren into submission?

Obedience has its place – and its price.

INTRODUCTION

The great third wave of freedom is receding and, despite hopes for the Arab Spring, no fourth wave is in sight—or at least so it seems.

With these sombre words, Vásquez and Porčnik (2016, p. 3) introduce their annual Human Freedom Index Report. There are indeed reasons to be cheerless. These include:

A predilection for ‘strong-man’ leaders, such as the USA’s Trump, the Philippines’ Duterte, Turkey’s Erdogan and Russia’s Putin;

A regression to religious fundamentalism, as in Indonesia and Turkey, erstwhile showcase ‘bookends’ of Islamic democracies;

The economic and military rise of China;

Rise of far-right nationalist movements and parties;

The failed Arab Spring, grinding wars in the Middle East, and the threat of nuclear war on the Korean Peninsula, and conflicts elsewhere (e.g. the formerly hope-full South Sudan, Myanmar...);

The disruption from large numbers of refugees seeking asylum;

The capacity of online platforms to misinform as much as to inform, alongside ‘hate preachers’ who purport to champion free speech, all the while toiling to smother it;

Young people’s disengagement from organised politics, and organisations generally;

Fracturing of alliances, as illustrated by ‘Brexit’ and Catalonia, and isolationist economic and other forms of nationalism, as evidenced in the USA.

Australia is the self-styled ‘land of the fair go’, and by most reckonings, it is well positioned on international league tables of democratic freedoms (Cato Institute, 2016; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2017). For some time, Australia has espoused lofty ambitions regarding the civics and citizenship education of its school students.

Civics and Citizenship Education in Australian education, designed to strengthen Australia’s democratic way of life, has been a significant component of Australian school education for more than two decades. The purpose of this chapter is to focus on key developments within Australian Civics and Citizenship Education in this period, though the content of civic education has existed within Australian education systems, curricula and schools for more than a century.

In Australia the term Civics and Citizenship Education (CCE) is used, rather than civic education, though the terms overlap considerably in the Australian context. By CCE we mean a school subject/learning experience that prepares school students in a democracy to become active, informed citizens. Mellor, Kennedy and Greenwood (2002, p. xvi) describe civic education as “a complex enterprise in-

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