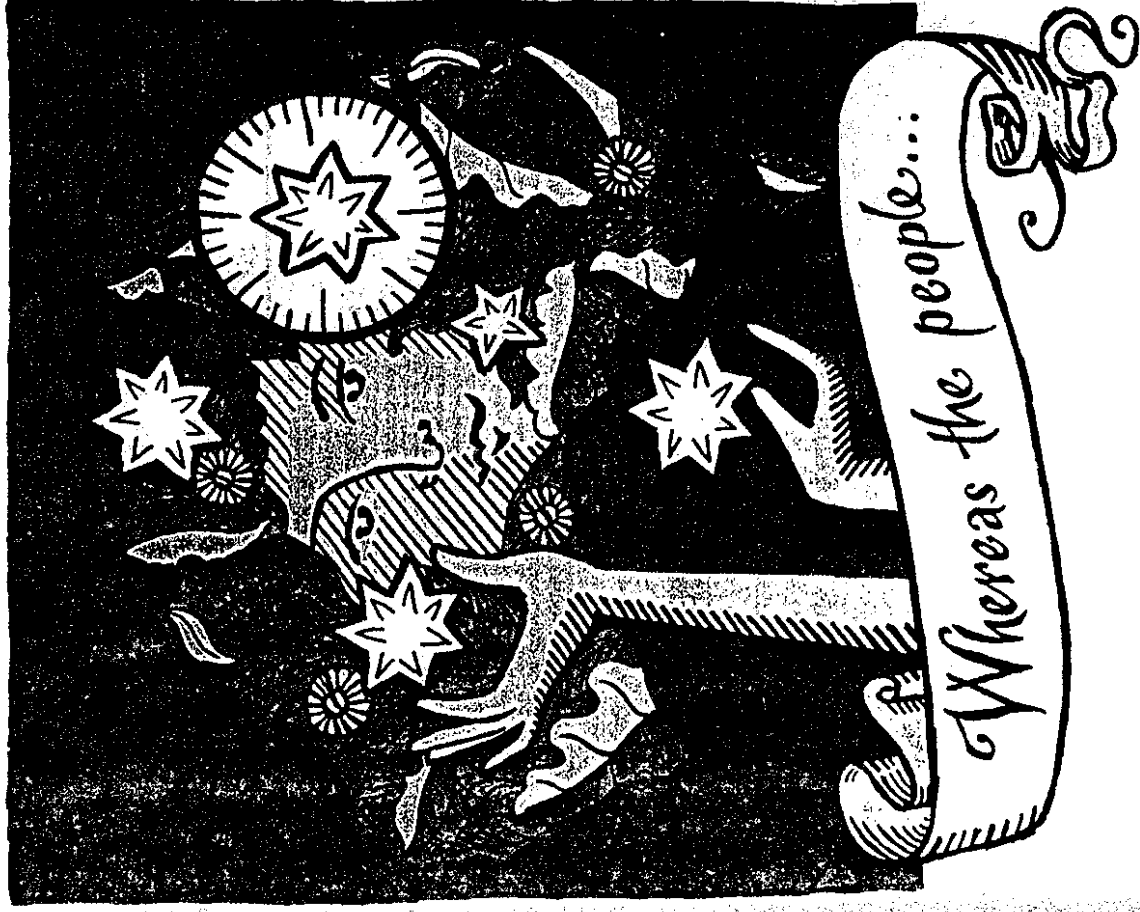


"Civics and Citizenship Education": Report of the Civics Expert Group

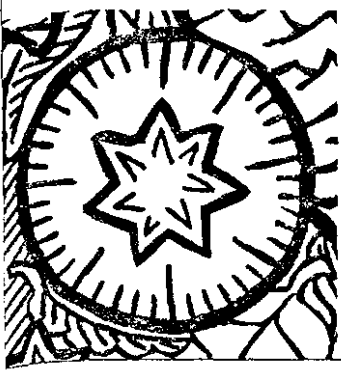
Proposals for Civics Education in Schools.

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ES AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Report of the Civics Expert Group



Chapter 4

PROPOSALS FOR CIVICS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

4.1 A framework for the civics curriculum

INTRODUCTION

In discussions with education authorities around Australia, the Group found uniform support for a greater emphasis on civics and citizenship education in schools.

What is taught in schools is a matter to be decided by education authorities in the states and territories; the advice we offer on school curriculum has no force other than the strength of the logic on which it is based.

The Group has not sought to prescribe what the specific content of civics education should be, nor is there unanimity around Australia about its detailed treatment in the curriculum. There was general consensus, however, that any successful program should incorporate knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in a comprehensive, sequential course of study for all students up to at least Year 10 in the key learning area of Studies of Society and Environment.

Many respondents cautioned against the development of a narrow civics program that might be limited to institutional knowledge at the expense of helping students to explore the wider issues relating to participation in a democratic society.

... there is precious little evidence available anywhere related to successful transmission of civics values. Even more troublesome is the evidence which seems to suggest that to promote and inform the public about governmental, constitutional, citizenship and civics issues does not ensure that students will become supportive of democratic values in the long term.

... evidence suggests that approaches supporting rote learning and ritual are ineffective. Positive attitudes to civics education are more likely to occur when people are given not only knowledge, but, more importantly, are encouraged to act upon their beliefs.'

Submission from Warren Pryor, Faculty of Education, Deakin University

A further challenge to civics education in the 1990s is to encompass diverse values and identities within a common Australian citizenship. We cannot attempt to impose a narrow or restrictive viewpoint. Civics education should assist students to



understand how Australians from different backgrounds can contribute in many diverse ways, yet still have a strong sense of belonging as Australian citizens.

Civics education should employ a broad understanding of citizenship, and its realisation in a viable curriculum presents an exciting challenge for schools.

The focus of these programs attempts to explore and investigate issues in values education by use of communication skills of speaking, listening, responding, assertiveness and decision-making. The development of these skills areas would assist in effective decision-making and participation skills within the community. Appropriate use of these skills is essential to the development of Australians' understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. The Commission believes that the inclusion of such concepts into any public education process is of the highest priority.'

*Submission from Rex, Tom Doyle, Executive Director,
Public Education Office of Melbourne*

Civics education cannot be insular. In the next century, more than ever before, Australian citizenship will require an appreciation of Australia's place in the world and of its international obligations. We should teach Australia's system of government with an awareness of other systems of government. Without apologising for our own expectations, we should be sensitive to the different understandings of citizenship within the region. Citizenship has a global dimension.

'My one particular hope is that the efforts to improve the teaching of civics in Australia will be tempered by the world in which that teaching takes place. It is a very different world from that in which the earlier endeavours to promote civics in the years immediately after federation took place. In particular, we live in a world where Australia and Australians must find their place in the international community...

There is a danger in a too narrow approach to a study of the Australian system of Government, the Australian Constitution and Australian citizenship that the civics course resulting will pander to the barren or dangerous demands of nationalism. Since Hiroshima at least, citizens of Australia have a heightened obligation to see themselves also as co-inhabitants of the world. Our polity must be seen (and must see itself) in the context of the growing moves towards international responses to global problems...

In building the first truly global, multicultural society, we are uniquely well placed to view our citizenship as an example and an inspiration for other countries. Let Australia be a splendid alternative to the blight of nationalism which has re-emerged as a danger to world peace in recent times.'

Submission from the Hon. Justice Michael Kirby, President, Court of Appeal, Supreme Court, NSW

CIVICS AND
AUSTRALIAN
HISTORY

We believe that a knowledge and understanding of the history of Australians is an essential foundation for Australian citizenship. It should be a core element of the curriculum for all students up to school leaving age.

The point must be made that the *history of Australians* is a broader field than what is usually meant by *Australian history*. While it is essential that all young people have a thorough knowledge and deep appreciation of the occupation of Australia by the indigenous peoples and of growth of the nation since 1788, it is important that they also have an understanding of the history and culture of the countries from which so many of their parents have recently come. We use the term Australian history in this broader sense in the report.

Australian history should have its basis in narrative, so that students will gain a sense of change over time. In the earlier years of schooling such stories of the past will make use of individual lives and particular episodes to introduce students to exemplary individuals, landmark events and their meaning. In later years the history will become more systematic in its chronology and periodisation. This approach should be supported by engaging audio-visual material and interactive computer programs.

It should be broadly based in social and cultural as well as constitutional and political history, so that students will be able to understand how some Australians (such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, convicts and women) were at first excluded from citizenship and how they pressed their claims for inclusion. In later years there can be closer attention to the changing forms and meanings of Australian citizenship as well as to its different and contested histories.

This history should be comparative and reflective. While students should gain a sense of Australian achievement, they should not be encouraged to be complacent or insular. British forms of sovereignty, government and justice can be contrasted with indigenous forms. Students can learn about the alternative civic traditions of Australians of non-British origin.

It should teach the skills of empathetic understanding and of placing events in historical context. By learning how to read the evidence of the past, students are better equipped to analyse current civic issues.