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Harry C. J. Phillips

Western Australian College of Advanced Education

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POLITICAL EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

'WELL-BEING' FOR YOUTH

Harry C J Phillips

WACAE

Interest in political socialisation and education, and the agencies through which it occurs, can be traced back to the beginnings of political theory. Much of Plato's Republic was devoted to the proper training patterns of various 'classes' in his ideal state. He reasoned that if political socialisation or civic training was defective a political system would inevitably degenerate through timocracy, oligarchy, and democracy to tyranny (Phillips and Rielly, 1982, 24). Aristotle, as Plato's outstanding student, took it for granted that the legislator should make the political education of the young a major goal. To ensure the stability of the Constitution, which to Aristotle meant not only the framework of government but a way of life, citizens had to be educated to what he called eudaimonia. The translation of happiness is slightly misleading. Well-being and similar words are often more accurate. The aim of ethics and also politics was to show people how to achieve eudaimonia. To live such a life people needed to be active, spirited, believe in what they are doing, have due self-esteem and proper respect for themselves and others (Stocker and Langtry, 1986, 26).

Today we share Aristotle's concern about the political education of our nation's youth. However, our focus is much broader than what Aristotle envisaged. The agenda encompasses youth from all 'classes', from both sexes, and all states of the Australian polity. Aristotle, too, had reservations about a democratic form of government which he regarded as a perverted (or wrong) form of rule by the many. Most Australians, though, think that democracy is a 'good word' which should be an element of the 'spirit' of our Constitution. This does not mean to say that the majority of Australians could articulate a clear understanding of what is meant by democracy. Professor Hugh Emy, a leading political scientist, recently complained that even many of his university students 'could not provide a reasoned defence of the values and principles on which our kind of liberal democracy is based.' Emy has found that

'very few students can tell you why the Constitution, Parliament or elections are important, or why ideas about participation and citizenship deserve to be taken seriously.....' (Cited in, Education for Active Citizenship: A Discussion Paper, 1988, 3)¹.

Many educators have expressed concern about the lack of political education for young Australians. Researchers have documented an absence of an acceptable rating of what has more recently been labelled 'political literacy'. This is not a test for the right to vote as J.S. Mill had advocated but 'a compound of knowledge, skills and attitudes which involves both some

¹ Of course Emy is aware of the many theories of democracy. See Wringe, C. (1984), p. 18. Wringe claims 'that democracies have at least one thing in common: that in some sense of the term the good of the people is supposed to be the prime purpose for which the state and other institutions exist'.

conscious understanding of what one is about in a given political situation and some capacity for action' (Crick and Lister, 1978, 37)². While it should be recognised that some of the knowledge questions (such as naming the current holders of ministerial portfolios) are often unreasonably difficult, the findings in each of the knowledge, skills and attitudes categories are cause for concern. Despite having institutionalised compulsory enrolment and compulsory voting, (which its proponents thought would foster political awareness), the majority of Australians 'reach 18 years without any feelings toward or knowledge of our political system and what it means to live in a democracy' (Research Report 1983, 10). Some of these findings were given media attention in 1983 because they were based on research conducted under the auspices of the Hawke government's newly created statutory authority, the Australian Electoral Commission. The Research Report (1983, 6-10), 'a quantitative analysis of attitudes towards enrolment and voting' found;

- (i) 'more than any other single factor, the lack of any perceived direct relevance of the political system (and, equally their concomitantly perceived inability to influence the course of political events) forms the basis of electoral inactivity amongst the young.'
- (ii) 'few young people have any knowledge of enrolment procedures or how the electoral system works.'
- (iii) 'all young people were specifically critical of the failure of the school or their own parents to provide them with sufficient political education.'

Evidence of widespread political ignorance was further documented when the Australian Electoral Commission investigated the abnormally high informal vote for the 1984 House of Representatives elections (Research Report 1985). Several members of the Hawke government had expressed views that the unduly prompt closing of the electoral rolls for the March 1983 election and the high informal vote in 1984 had both attenuated Labor's electoral performance. The findings did not completely support their contentions but prevalence of a theory that the government could enhance its formal electoral vote with better education augured well for the political literacy cause. Susan Ryan, then Commonwealth Minister for Education, gave further encouragement when she suggested that electoral education 'should be a basic part of every child's education' (*Sydney Morning Herald* 20/2/1985).

The charter of the Australian Electoral Commission, with political educator Dr Colin Hughes at the helm, required it inter-alia to;

- (i) promote public awareness of electoral and Parliamentary matters by means of the conduct of education and information programmes
- (ii) conduct and promote research into electoral matters and other matters that relate to its functions.
- (iii) publish on matters that relate to its functions.
- (iv) perform any of its functions in conjunction with the electoral authorities of a state or of the Northern Territory (See Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918, Section 7 [1]).

The provision for state electoral authorities to be part of the research and educational network should not go unnoticed. Significantly, though, the Commission officials provided immediate evidence that research and education was to be given a high priority. The analysis of attitudes towards enrolment and voting gave rise to a proposal that many of the impediments to enrolment

could be overcome by a campaign which adopted 'creative approaches'. One of the most obvious strategies was to capitalise upon feelings of national pride. Another was to link the vote to adult responsibility. A third approach was to emphasise the importance of youth having a say about matters of significance to them such as educational allowances, the dole or taxation (Research Report 1983, 8). Nor were the first set of educational publications limited to voting procedures and descriptions of the formal structure of parliament. The ubiquity of politics was recognised. Treatment of concepts such as power and authority, democracy and federalism was undertaken. A positive feeling of political efficacy³ was encouraged. It meant that the Electoral Commission was actively engaged in promoting national political literacy.

It was salutary to observe that the material produced under the guidance of the Australian Electoral Commission (and Film Australia) was colourful, interesting and relevant to the interests of young men and women. Sensitivity to the needs of migrants and Aborigines was also displayed. It will be recalled how the electoral office once limited its educational function to explaining voting procedures. Pamphlets and short films were produced but they were mostly dismal publications which had a minimal educational impact. However, those responsible for the preparation of video materials such as 'Genghis I', 'Talkback', and 'That's Democracy' deserve acclaim. The production of 'The People's Power Pact' also comes under this umbrella. The wide distribution, including use of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) school broadcast channels, made it less likely that teachers had to grapple with the galling copyright laws⁴. In addition the Electoral Commission printed an election kit and encouraged its district returning offices to visit schools as guest lecturers, conduct mock elections and generally fulfil an educational role. In Canberra an Electoral Education Centre was established in the grounds of the Lyons Primary School to provide electoral education sessions for the 60 000 upper primary and secondary students who visit Canberra on educational tours each year.

To further the cause of political literacy the Commonwealth Parliament began to play a much more 'central' role. As had been the practice in most states officers of the Parliament had traditionally confined their educational activities to guided tours and the preparation of coloured pamphlets and booklets explaining the rudiments of the Westminster parliamentary system. Access to these materials was mainly confined to students on excursion, tourists, and a small number of interested citizens. However, from 1984 the Education and Research section of the Parliament began to prepare teaching kits for distribution to pupils throughout the primary and secondary school system of the nation.

Each school in Australia should now have received a Parliament Pack I prepared for upper primary and lower secondary students; and Parliament Pack 2 which is for secondary students. The latter would be of considerable use to most tertiary students and adult audiences as it contains a goldmine of information. Some networking and good public relations (notably by Merrilllee Chignell from the Parliamentary Education Office) has increased the acceptance of the Packs. The need to target teacher training institutions and departments, which also instigate many in-service programmes, has been recognised. Prepared by trained educators after considerable trialing and consultation the Packs contain well researched material, a range of teaching

² J.S. Mill's participation theory 'dilutes universal suffrage by denying the right to vote to persons who cannot read, write, or do simple arithmetic, who pay no taxes, or who receive welfare (parish relief). None of these exclusions is based on the principle of competence.' See Thompson, D. (1976), p. 98.

³ Political efficacy is a term which refers to a person's belief that political change can be effected or retarded and that his or her efforts, alone or in concert with others can produce desired behaviour on the part of political authorities. See Phillips and Reilly, (1982, p. 19).

⁴ The Copyright Amendment Bill currently before the Commonwealth Parliament sets up arrangements under which educational institutions may make off-air copies of television programmes in return for payment to copyright owners. If institutions strictly enforce the copyright laws many valuable television programmes on current events can not be used as a resource.

ideas, as well as videos. The Packs are not confined to the mechanics of the parliamentary process but include a huge volume of historical material and debate about contemporary conflicts. It has been said there is an absence of material on the dynamics of the political parties and the executive arm of government. Nevertheless if the Packs are properly utilized they represent a significant contribution to the resource base for teaching Australian politics and government.

A decade ago the keenest teacher of school courses covering aspects of politics and government could validly complain about the lack of print and non print resources. Nowadays this situation has been partly redressed especially if the focus is federal government. Apart from materials produced by the Electoral Commission, Parliament, Film Australia and the ABC, a wealth of student texts, charts and simulation exercises have been commercially published for a potential national market⁵. However, problems still remain for the production of state and local government materials which have a reduced clientele. Pupils in each state learning about their respective state and local governments are much more receptive to their own history and institutions. Even if such an opinion irks in some quarters Australia is still politically and educationally a federation. Yet such a constitutional framework does not appear to inhibit political education in the United States of America. Indeed reverence for the Constitution, institutions of government, and political symbols is generally inculcated in the school system of that nation. Reference to political symbols does raise the question as to whether the community disagreement about the appropriateness of Australia's political symbols, such as the flag and anthem, is a factor which reduces many children's early positive identification with our political system.

Recognition that the Commonwealth Parliament and Electoral Commission have been engaged in such a major educational exercise directed attention to the role of State Parliaments (and in some cases their electoral commissions) in promoting political literacy. The comparative dearth of resources at the state level gave more urgency to such a review. In the most populous state, New South Wales, an education department officer has been deployed to work for the Parliament. Fortunately the officer, Helen Williams, was trained in the law and was extremely knowledgeable about the needs of teachers endeavouring to present politics courses. A book of teaching materials has been prepared for levels of government courses in Years Five and Six. Informational material has also been prepared for a newly introduced Legal Studies course in Year Eleven and Year Twelve. The Law Week display and activities now includes parliamentary education material. Yet in the 'premier' state there is no secondary course which has government or politics as its major title or focus. Such studies are incorporated in History (Year 9), Commerce (Year 9), and other society and culture general studies.

The Parliament of Victoria has not appointed an education officer although the conducting of tours is on a large scale. The information kit for visitors is very useful. Since 1976 Politics has been a tertiary entrance (formerly High School Certificate - H.S.C.) course. Before the dismissal of the Whitlam government, which undoubtedly sparked interest in the institutions of Australian government, politics had been studied under a broad title. Today some 5 000 candidates from 300 schools are annually enrolled in the unit. While these aggregate figures appear impressive it still means that only about

⁵ A resource kit entitled 'Blood on the Wattle' produced for the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department in conjunction with the ABC is designed to help senior secondary students understand the Constitution. The ABC has produced a number of secondary school television programmes, including 'Voting 1' and 'Voting 2' and a series called 'How Government Works'. Two productions called 'Secrets and All of Us' make up a segment on local government for upper primary students. Another resource is Film Australia's 'Australia'. Produced in 1988 two videos in the set 'Rights and Responsibilities' and 'Political Power' deal with politics.

5 to 8 per cent of all students undertaking secondary education actually reach Year 12 and also opt to study the Politics course (*Education for Active Citizenship*, 1989, 25). How changes planned for 1991 will alter registration is difficult to forecast. Another factor will be the introduction of a compulsory year eleven Australian Studies course. This will focus upon the study of work from the perspectives of the various social sciences, including politics.

The long standing H.S.C. Politics course in Victoria has aided the advancement of political education in Australia. It has helped raise the status of 'politics' as a school subject and led some to realise there are vocational advantages pursuing such studies. In many areas of employment such as the public sector, media, commerce and social welfare a knowledge of how government works is a valuable asset. For those likely to be engaged in future pressure group activity such background studies would be useful. Enrolments, too, have been sufficient to stimulate the production of texts and materials suitable for youth nearing the completion of their school years. The Victorian Association of Secondary Social Studies Teachers (VASST) has co-ordinated the preparation of resources for this subject. Surprisingly the presence of the politics course has not stimulated a demand for more of a political dimension in the many social education units in the primary and secondary social studies programme. Nor did the apparent popularity of politics in the H.S.C. in Victoria prompt nearby Tasmania to follow suit.

In Tasmania the Parliament has confined its educational role to conducting school tours and visits by members of the public. In essence this has been the pattern in Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia. Of late, the Western Australian Parliament has appointed a public relations officer with educational responsibilities. A body of advisory teachers has been established. Attempts are being made to improve the educational effectiveness of parliamentary visits. Discussions are taking place assessing the viability of teacher in-service programmes being conducted in the Parliament. The promotion of a mock parliament is planned. These and other proposals are being negotiated with an awareness that the Western Australian Electoral Commission, created in 1987, has been assigned similar educational and research functions to their Canberra counterpart (Acts Amendment [Electoral Reform] Act, No.40 of 1987, Section 5F). To this juncture the Commission's educational activity has been confined to a massive newspaper distribution of coloured electoral boundary maps, an election candidate booklet, and media spots attempting to explain the new (Senate type) voting system. Now one of the Commission's immediate research tasks is to investigate the abnormally high informal vote in the February 4, 1989 Western Australian election.

So Parliaments throughout Australia have, in varying degrees, become more involved in political education. One significant development in this new direction was the decision of the Australian Senate on March 23, 1988 to request its all party Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training to conduct an inquiry into education for active citizenship and youth organisations. Although the Australian Constitution, except for the benefits to students clause in Section 51(XXIIIa), renders education as a residual state power, the unanimous decision to pursue the investigation could be interpreted as recognition that the problem required a national approach. In pursuing the national inquiry the Committee took the view that a major aim of 'Education for Active Citizenship' (1989, 4) should be to provide students with;

- (i) an understanding of how government works (at the Commonwealth, State and local level);
- (ii) an appreciation of the role of Community groups and non-government organisations; and
- (iii) motivation to be active citizens.

The active citizens reference implied the advocacy of political participation

and the development of skills to pursue this activity. A survey of ideas associated with extolling participation in politics, dating from Aristotle, was recently undertaken by Geraint Parry (1972, 18-19). He asserted the ideas may be subsumed under two, broad headings - 'instrumental' and 'developmental'. The former treat political participation as a means for citizens to defend and promote their interests. The latter regard political participation as an essential part of the process of political and civic education.

Citizens, however, may accept the merits of participation but lack the skills to realise the benefits. As Robert M Jackson wrote in *Teaching Political Science* (1980, 62);

Until individuals are able to participate in the political/economic market place with some success, what they may think or believe is unimportant in comparison to their non-participation.

Jackson then devised a syllabus for a political skills laboratory. Informed students upon completion of the course would:

- (i) be able to organise and run a meeting more successfully;
- (ii) be able to bargain more effectively;
- (iii) be able to communicate within and between groups more effectively;
- (iv) be able to manage a crisis more effectively;
- (v) be experienced in organising a political coalition;
- (vi) be more aware of personal stress and some of the ways to reduce it;
- (vii) be more aware of the substance of a number of current political issues, and
- (viii) be more aware of the dynamics of political conflict and co-operation.²⁴

Active citizenship, incorporating participation skills similar to those which Jackson had identified, was to be differentiated from 'education for citizenship' which once had a place in the civics courses of many Australian schools. So having signalled this direction the Standing Committee (Education for Active Citizenship, 1989, 4), by medium of public submissions and a series of hearings throughout the Commonwealth, considered:

- (i) available evidence concerning the degree of understanding of Australia's political processes among young people in the Australian community;
- (ii) current programs and other provisions made in Australian primary and secondary schools, and in youth organisations, for education for active citizenship;
- (iii) the adequacy of teacher education programs for this purpose;
- (iv) the availability and suitability of teaching resource materials; and
- (v) any other relevant matters.

The Committee's public deliberations can be read in the various Hansard collections with highlights being initially published in July 1988 under the title 'Education for Active Citizenship: A Discussion Paper'. The final report 'Education for Active Citizenship' was dated February 1989. It was evident the Committee had been apprised of developments overseas where some educationists in countries such as the United Kingdom, The United States of America, Canada, West Germany and Hong Kong were innovatively addressing concerns about political education. One submission from the Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA) also requested that the Committee 'embrace a global perspective.' To be responsible 'global citizens' young

people must understand international political structures and comprehend Australia's many links with other people's and countries through aid, trade, tourism, immigration, foreign policy and human rights (Education for Active Citizenship: A Discussion Paper, 1989, 10).

The notion of a 'global citizen' was sympathetically received by the Committee but in accordance with its terms of reference it concentrated on active citizenship in the Australian polity. Research data and much anecdotal evidence illustrated the extent of political illiteracy in the nation. A rationale for action was articulated. Recent initiatives were tabulated with many being outside the ambit of the school system. Importantly, too, some of the barriers to achieving the active citizenship goals were documented. The most formidable of these barriers will now be briefly canvassed before some concluding comments are made.

BARRIERS

1. Politics

Australians do not generally view politics 'as the creative, conciliation of differing interests, whether interests are seen as primarily material or moral' (Crick: 1977, 35). Rather the term is used pejoratively in connection with federal, state and local government. There is often an implication that politics is a kind of game, even an unduly deceptive game, the rules of which are too complex to be understood by most spectators. Many consider the game too hard for them to play. The politicians themselves on honesty, ethics (*The Bulletin*, 14/6/1988, 17) and even work scales are (perhaps unfairly) invariably given low ratings (*The West Australian*, 25/1/1989).

The reasons for the prevalence of these attitudes in our culture would require a treatise to explain. What it means though, is that politics and politicians have an image problem (Cohen: 1989, 33). Unfortunately this means that educational programmes and courses which include politics in the title conjure adverse thoughts. As a consequence politics is often ignored as a study area. It may be speculated that this avoidance is more common amongst young women. However, this proposition requires further research.

2. The Function of Ignorance (or Apathy)

The 'Education for Active Citizenship: Discussion Paper' (1988, 3) was opened with an exposition of the function of ignorance argument. Admittedly there was no assertion that young people, especially women, were more likely to subscribe to such a thesis. Theories that the stability of western democratic systems are at least partly dependent on the genuine lack of interest of the public have been published before (Blumler: 1974). However, the submission by Dr Michael Symonds to the Senate Standing Committee explained the public's ignorance about facets of the democratic state with the claim:

They [the public] know politics has nothing to do with liberal democratic ideals of rational, disinterested representation; they know it is a corrupting battle for gain and influence Parliamentary politics is caught within a system of power that has nothing to do with the ballot box. The response to all this which Australians have chosen is a combination of ignorance, apathy and cynicism....

The Symonds' scenario can make us mindful of the need to avoid a naive romanticised approach to the study of political life which confuses the ideals of democracy with the realities of politics (Siegal: 1987, 90). Unfortunately, though, those who don't see a place for political education (particularly in schools) tellingly adopt the function of ignorance argument, often in a misunderstood form, to hinder its adoption in the curriculum. If this view is expressed by members of the social science fraternity and then further coloured by the perennial fear of political bias, furthering the cause of political education and active citizenship is a difficult exercise.

3. The Fear of Bias

Bernard Crick (1977, 34) who, a decade ago, chaired an influential working party for the British Hansard Society's 'Programme for Political Education' has noted:

how many councillors, officials and parents would believe in principle that politics 'should be taught in schools', 'because it is so important to us all' but in practice oppose it or obstruct because they believe it cannot be taught without bias.

Another educationist, Bernard Jones (1980, 408), working on a scheme to prepare teachers to conduct politics courses in British secondary schools warned that the political education 'take off' could easily be aborted. The programme would 'have to overcome the major problem that has faced all previous attempts at political education: the fear of bias and indoctrination that is ever present in a liberal society'. Jones, who observed that concern about bias tended to be overlooked in other value laden social sciences and in the 'hidden' curriculum, said the issue of political education should be 'conceived of as a political issue'. There must be a 'political will' to jettison the 'take off'.

Of course Crick and Jones were championing political literacy in the United Kingdom. However, those in the same vanguard in Australia will be aware of the application of such observations although nowadays the broader notion of 'social engineering' is often spoken of rather than the term bias (Wringe: 1984, 34)⁶. Historically the fear of bias has been a latent impediment to the introduction of political education in Australia. Even when aspects of government were included in school curriculums they took the form of an arid constitutional, institutional and purely descriptive approach. Such courses were invariably labelled as 'boring'. In this respect the broadening notion of political literacy has helped the political education cause. As writers (Crick and Porter, 1978) in this field have said:

Plainly if we want citizens, we have to tolerate some of the unpredictable inconveniences of action and participation, we have to teach or let the pupils learn skills relevant to political education. There are many ways: gaming and simulation, perhaps just old fashioned debates, or perhaps some voluntary share in communal tasks; and a political education is surely something to do with the whole organisation of the school, although it does not imply re-organising the whole school. Informed and orderly participation, not any old participation is needed.

The activities of organisations such as the Social Education Association of Australia (SEAA) have also surely helped lessen the force of the fear of bias argument. Since its inception in 1982 the SEAA has been attempting to upgrade the status of political education by providing a rationale for the introduction of such courses. The Association has argued consistently (Education for Active Citizenship: A Discussion Paper, 1988, 8):

There are also grounds to believe that once political courses have been implemented the fear of bias rapidly recedes. Educators charged with the responsibility of implementing these courses are invariably aware of their professional responsibilities. It is soon appreciated that politics is not simply a matter of party position. Moreover many modern youth are educated to

⁶ Wringe claims 'those who are most vociferous in opposing the use of education for what they term 'social engineering' are themselves not entirely free of political motivation and may have an interest in preserving the status quo. That the fabric of a democratic society such as Australia, is fragile and that its continued well being is dependent on its citizens being knowledgeable about political processes and competent to participate in them. More importantly, it contends, Australian citizens must value their democratic heritage and be committed to uphold it and willing to participate in it. The achievement of these qualities should be a major goal for schooling.

think critically. They are not easily swayed by the slanted delivery of views. If teachers occasionally attempt to impose an ideological stance such actions can often be recognised. The students live in a world where radio and television current affairs programmes have substantial political content. They have to make a judgement about the balance of the delivery. It also means that to be 'with it' students have to know more about how the system works. They, too, want the capacity to make governments more accountable for they seek Aristotle's eudaimonia. It's 'quite embarrassing' some students from New South Wales told the Senate Standing Committee 'to be denied any form of education in politics or political philosophy (Education for Active Citizenship: A Discussion Paper, 1988, 2).

4. The School Curriculum

The absence of a curriculum which explicitly provides education in politics as a basis for active citizenship skills is an obvious problem. As already mentioned this has mostly been the case throughout Australian schools. Normally, though, this did not deny a teacher in any State or Territory the opportunity in social studies or social education to provide students with some political education. Formal statements of curriculum objectives at both State and Federal levels seek to 'equip students with a capacity to understand and participate in the democratic process of society around them.' Presumably the implementation of a national curriculum will incorporate similar objectives⁷. But formal statements of policy or objectives are not reliable indicators of what is actually taking place or what is in the curriculum. In accordance with the requests of students to the Standing Committee what is required are compulsory core unit(s) in politics. Elective units and incidental teaching is too much of a 'hit and miss' situation for the students.

What occurred in Western Australia is worthy of brief consideration particularly as studies of political socialisation suggest that the acquisition of political attitudes and concepts are often acquired early in a child's education (Greenstein, 1965 and Jaros, 1973). A K-10 social studies syllabus was implemented in 1983 with the blessing of the Education Department hierarchy. It was structured around five themes based on the major social sciences disciplines namely Environment (geography); Resources (economics); Society and Culture (sociology and anthropology); Change (history); and Decision Making (politics). Given the disparaging connotation of the term 'politics' and the fear of bias tradition it was decided to title the politics sequence 'Decision Making'. Importantly though, politics had been allocated a separate stream rather than being incidentally addressed by the other disciplines. It meant the formulation of these units could draw upon the expertise of the political scientists. The latter could identify with the curriculum whereas nobody owns social studies or even citizenship education. Each pupil progressing through the primary and secondary schools was expected, as part of their core curriculum, to study decision making (i.e. politics) units in each year of schooling. The topics in this theme were as follows:

Primary	Secondary
Year 1 - Family Rules	Year 8 - Law
Year 2 - School Rules	Year 9 - Australia's Government
Year 3 - Community Rules	Year 10 - International
Year 4 - Decision Making	Co-operation and Conflict
Year 5 - Community Decision (Local Government)	
Year 6 - Western Australian	
Year 7 - Carrying out the Law	

⁷ As recently as December 1988, the Commonwealth Minister for Education, Mr J. Dawkins, advised the Committee that the Australian Education Council is considering a draft set 'of national goals for schooling', one of which is 'to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which will enable students to participate in our democratic Australian society as active and informed citizens.'

Just recently the secondary programme was modified to a unit curriculum schedule. Although the introduction of the scheme has caused some headaches there appears to have been an unexpected positive outcome for political education. 'Australia's Government' and 'Law' have been designated as 'desirable units'. Given the latent demand of young people for more political education literally hundreds of students have been choosing to study 'Australia's Government'. Teachers have been able to take advantage of the resources which have been produced. The leadership

by the Ministry's Social Studies Consultant, Glen Bennett, has been an enabling factor. In this latter area we are all aware of how resistance in the bureaucracy can frustrate the implementation of policy and new programmes.

There has been deserved commendation for the Western Australian K-10 Syllabus, though, from a political education perspective it is clear that some of the potential benefits (particularly at the primary level) have not been achieved. The sequence of 'Decision Making' units were developed from major generalisations namely 'societies function in accordance with rules which regulate the behaviour of individuals and groups' and 'societies develop rules in many ways, ranging from formal intention (laws) to informal evolution (mores)'. Concepts such as rules and laws, power and authority were to be treated in meaningful social contexts. Materials were prepared on the various tiers of government and some skills for active citizenship were specified. Resources were printed to assist implementation and several in-service courses were conducted. It was certainly thought a great leap forward had been made.

Unfortunately surveys had indicated that the sequence of decision making units have frequently not been presented to the pupil in sufficient detail. 'Decision Making' was the last of the five units in the Teachers Syllabus Guide published for each year level. This increased the prospect of the unit being attempted just prior to the Christmas vacation. It was frequently relegated to the too hard basket, taught with trepidation and frequently only taken at times of the day when energy is waning for both teachers and students. Nevertheless as many students had a brief introduction to the 'decision making' units they saw no need, or felt no desire, to enrol for the Year Eleven and Year Twelve.

Politics tertiary entrance subject. In marked contrast to the Victorian situation the candidates for this course have remained stagnant at a few hundred for several years. It has only been maintained by the energies of a select number of teachers, mostly in the private school sector. An unduly theoretical Year Eleven Politics unit coupled with programming difficulties in many high schools has also kept the number of candidates very low. However, the most severe problem for the presentation of the tertiary entrance course, and the 'decision making' sequence in primary and secondary schools, is the inadequate content and conceptual background of teachers in the discipline of politics. Many also lack the skills and attitudes to effectively foster political literacy. The outcome is that many teachers opt to overlook the 'decision making' units, or to treat them superficially.

5. Teacher Preparation

Without teacher expertise the best prepared syllabus in political education will not be effectively implemented. Excellently produced resources will be under-utilized. Even some of the best teaching strategies such as mock parliaments and simulation exercises will not be recognized. The suitability of elections as a study focus (Alper and Hogan, 1979) and the difficulty inherent in teaching the concept of federalism will not be fully understood.

As only a small percentage of graduating teachers (less than 5%) complete an introductory unit in politics or government they generally lack the confidence and background to perform their task in this domain as effectively as desired. Hence a recommendation that teacher trainees undertake such studies may

seem to be a simple solution. But course controllers in such institutions face a plethora of competing demands. Even subject jealousies within the social sciences are difficult to reconcile. However, expressions of 'political will' even if they take the form of an all party Standing Committee investigation can help override this form of resistance. At the Western Australian College of Advanced Education, the major teacher training institution in that state, the work of the Standing Committee was a factor enabling the inclusion of a 'Citizenship Education' unit in the core programme for all secondary social studies teachers.

Another possibility is the requirement of an Australian Studies unit for prospective social science teachers. If such a unit were to incorporate some political history, canvas the distribution of power and address the workings of government, it could help provide teachers with the confidence to conduct various curriculum units in politics. Such interdisciplinary courses are difficult to mount and sustain but they can attract endorsement from a wide spectrum of vested interests, particularly if they are linked to developing national pride. Although much has been done in the last few years it will be necessary to be mindful that Australian Studies may be moved down the agenda as 1988 has passed. Moreover, the Bicentennial Australian Studies School project failed to address the question of political education, despite the fact that a national conference called to identify priorities for the project gave this area of the curriculum particularly high priority. Nor did the Committee which reviewed Australia studies in tertiary education make any explicit reference or call for Australian politics in its 1987 Report titled *Windows onto Worlds*.

An awareness of how programmes can fail without appropriate teacher preparation is borne of many years experience. In South Australia, for instance, there are grounds for optimism, with the pending junior-primary to year ten syllabus. At least six of the understandings upon which the syllabus is based relate to political literacy. Categories of skills (including some decision making skills) and a values stream incorporating social justice is planned. Tertiary entrance courses in politics are already in place and a compulsory Australian Studies unit in Year Eleven is scheduled for 1991. Although some units in the primary and secondary syllabus have had a political flavour not all students have been required to do these courses. The new proposals obligate pupils to pursue political studies.

In Queensland proposals to introduce politics as one of five themes in the compulsory years of schooling is at an earlier stage of development. Presently the primary social studies programme contains some politics and government references. In Year Nine and Year Ten a citizenship education stream has a strong government flavour. Also students who complete the 'Study of Society' unit for tertiary entrance find that about one quarter of the content has a political emphasis. Pressures for a separate politics unit have been evident. If the latter is accepted it will prompt the extension of the resource base on Australian Government from the Queensland perspective. As in South Australia, though, the success of the new proposals will depend so much on the availability of teachers who can manage the courses.

The focus upon schools and teacher training should not ignore the significant impact that other political socialization agencies can have in promoting political education and particularly active citizenship. The Senate Standing Committee had included in its brief an appreciation of the role of community and non-government organisations. The Discussion paper cited extracts of contributions from The Girls Brigade of Australia, and The Girl Guides Association of Australia. Church groups, police clubs, sporting associations, trade unions and even political parties are often engaged in active citizenship training. The diverse range of their activities makes authoritative comment

difficult. However, it is undoubtedly a fertile arena for the allocation of incentive funding for the pursuance of active citizenship projects.

The profound influence of the family, or household, as a socialisation agency has been well documented. Clearly, the family, because of its dominant position in the early life of most children, provides a network of subtle influences in the political socialisation process. Research in many countries has demonstrated that there is a significant correlation between the party identification of parents and that of their children. What is less clear is the extent to which an individual's political personality, his or her political attitudes and chosen methods of acting politically are determined by the family (Phillips and Rielly, 1982, 26). Education initiatives in this realm are difficult to accomplish but it should be remembered that many youth in the 1983 enrolment and voting survey were critical of the absence of guidance from their parents.

After surveying Australian school children, R.W. Connell, (1971) concluded that children were not fully moulded by adult socialisation techniques, there was a good deal of conscious creativity expressed by children in the development of their own beliefs. He found the main events of political socialisation were the mass media, in particular, television. In the middle of a child's usual viewing times came the news, which was the main source of the child's knowledge about politics. Children, he argued, tended to acquire much descriptive knowledge about politics before they understood how it actually worked. It is a finding that makes it imperative that any national approach to political education needs to consider the functions of the public and private sections of the media. The legislation regulating this sector needs to be effective, to enhance the 'well being' of youth.

CONCLUSION

Those at the forefront of the political education cause in Australia appreciate that the last few years have been years of plenty compared with the preceding long famine. What has been unique is how much of the machinery to produce the relative abundance has been supplied by Parliament and the Australian Electoral Commission. It has also been a healthy case of Parliament responding to the 'will of the people', or at least youth. Growing up in modern Australia means exposure to a more political environment. Youth have to know the rudiments of how the system works and acquire the skills to participate when necessary in the political process.

The findings of the Parliament's own Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training on 'Education for Active Citizenship' has ensured that the call for political education will probably gain further momentum. In the preface to its recommendations the Standing Committee stated 'the situation revealed in this report amounts to a crisis which Australians cannot afford to ignore' (See Appendix 1). Certainly many of the present initiatives must be sustained. The availability of teaching resources needs to be extended to include state and local government topics. A plan to manage the placement and distribution of these resources should be devised. Teacher preparation, both pre-service and inservice, is a priority area. Teachers require the content and conceptual background to have the confidence to achieve curriculum objectives in political education. Students throughout Australia need to undertake some politics units to achieve an acceptable political literacy rating. These courses need to identify skills and foster attitudes which make active citizenship more realizable. Attempts to achieve such objectives with general social studies courses is a strategy doomed to fail.

Although educators can't raise the status of politicians or always erase the word politics from course titles their cause can be advanced by commitment

to political education by leaders of government and their opposition counterparts. Obviously if the key officers of the various Ministries of Education (and other private school systems) are supportive progress can be quickened. Very few would question the goal of seeking Aristotle's eudaimonia or 'well being'. It is a goal that is still far from being achieved.

APPENDIX I

RECOMMENDATIONS: SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING.

Source Education for Active Citizenship in Australian Schools and Youth Organisations, February 1989, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

The Committee believes that the situation revealed in this report amounts to a crisis which Australians cannot afford to ignore. In response, the Committee makes the following recommendations in the course of the report:

- 1 that the Commonwealth initiate a national program in education for active citizenship, directed at the whole community, to overcome the deficiencies identified in this report. The program should be based on the recommendations made in this report. (page 17)
- 2 that the Commonwealth designate education for active citizenship as a priority area for improvements in primary and secondary schooling, and that, through the Australian Education Council and other appropriate avenues, the Commonwealth encourage State and non-government school authorities to adopt the same policy. (page 33)
- 3 that the Australian Electoral Commission institute procedures which encourage people to place greater significance on their placement on the electoral roll and their access to the democratic right to vote. (page 34)
- 4 (i) that the Commonwealth ask all higher education institutions with responsibility for teacher education to ensure that education faculties recognise the importance of education for active citizenship and make provision for it as a component in pre-service courses, particularly for those teacher education students who are likely to teach in social studies and related areas of the curriculum. (page 48)
(ii) that in negotiations with education authorities concerning levels of Commonwealth funding for schools, the Commonwealth designate education for active citizenship as a priority area for expenditure on in-service education. (page 49)
- 5 that as a matter of priority, the Curriculum Development Centre assume responsibility for fostering the development of adequate teaching resources for education for active citizenship, monitoring progress in achieving this goal, and coordinating projects where required. Particular emphasis should be placed on developments relating to the State and local level. (page 62)
- 6 that the Commonwealth amend its Strategy for Young People to indicate support for the goal of promoting active citizenship among Australia's young people. The Commonwealth should acknowledge the important role played by youth organisations in achieving this goal and actively promote policies which assist those organisations in this respect. (page 70).

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CHANGING SOCIETAL AND FAMILIAL TRENDS: CHANGING TEACHER STRATEGIES

Dawn Butterworth

WACAE

Teachers today are working in an era of rapid and complex change. Not only must they be aware of these societal and familial changes, but they must also know how to respond to the changed needs of individual children within the context of their changing families and society. It is no longer appropriate for teachers to operate on the basis of out-of-date stereotypes depicted by texts and teachings which have been based on earlier life-styles and circumstances. Teacher education institutions must also play their part in ensuring that both pre and post-service teachers are kept abreast of these rapid societal and familial changes and of recommended strategies arising out of these changes, if teachers are to effectively meet the needs of individual children within the context of their families and society as they exist today.

CHANGES IN WESTERN SOCIETY

Within western society, there has been a change from a predominantly industrialised society to an economy based on the creation and distribution of information (Naisbett, 1982). The education system has traditionally attempted to assist children to fit into an industrialised society by emphasizing the work ethic, conformity, the ability to follow directions and the necessity of meeting time and standardisation constraints. The new traits of independence, creative thinking and literacy skills will now be needed by children to cope with the new economy that is based on information creation and distribution. The formal mode of learning currently in vogue needs to be replaced by more informal means to develop the independent and creative skills of young children.

Rapidly changing technology is affecting every aspect of our living: the environment, work place, industry, transport, communications, medicine, educational institutions, as well as cultural and sporting activities.

The new technologies pose challenges to the society and to its members ... There is the need for people to understand and to use the new technology, to be positively oriented to its potential benefits, to feel that they are masters, in control, rather than manipulated puppets. They need to be able to withstand its potential dehumanising, depersonalising and isolating effects, and to maintain their own priorities in a situation of information overload. They need to be aware of the social and moral implications of the technological revolution and to be able to make a genuine contribution to the resolution of the dilemmas that the applications of the technology create. There is the strong likelihood that the information technologies will exert major effects on both teaching and on styles of learning. (Watts, 1987, p. 12)

A positive self-concept, awareness of appropriate technology and human communication skills are necessary in order for individuals to cope successfully in this new, highly technological world. The advent of the communication satellite has meant that the world has become a smaller place where everyone