

Australian Association for Environmental Education Response to the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship Draft Shape Paper Consultation

10th August 2012

Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on the June 2012 Civics and Citizenship Draft Shape Paper. This submission is offered to provide a critical reflection and practical suggestions to inform the ongoing debate about this important aspect of the emerging curriculum for future generations.

The Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) congratulates the writing team for the depth and scope of the paper. We appreciate that describing civics and citizenship in the Australian Curriculum context is an extremely complex task and that your team has been engaged in considered debate with a range of organizations and key stakeholders to refine the essence of the work.

The following comments are provided to assist with the further development of the description of civics and citizenship in the Australian Curriculum.

1. The recognition of young Australians (students) as existing active citizens.

The shape paper, while referring to civics and citizenship education providing opportunities for students to take part in active citizenship activities, does not primarily engage **with** students as existing active and informed citizens. Rather the paper describes civics and citizenship education as being about teaching civics and citizenship **to** students **for** them to become informed and active citizenships in the future, as adults.

For example

Paragraph 5 in the Context p2.

‘Civics and Citizenship education is uniquely positioned to **provide opportunities for** young people **to become** active and informed citizens. It presents exciting and challenging opportunities for school authorities, schools and teachers to **prepare students for adult citizenship**, both as part of the formal school curriculum and as part of a wider whole-school program.’

Could be written as

Civics and Citizenship education is uniquely positioned to **connect with** young people **as** active and informed citizens. It presents exciting and challenging opportunities for school authorities, schools and teachers **to engage with students in active citizenship**

learning, both as part of the formal school curriculum and as part of a wider whole-school program.

Paragraph 11 a) in the Rationale p4

‘Civics and Citizenship education involves the development of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs and values that **enable** students to effectively participate in community activities and public affairs locally, nationally and globally.’

Could change **enable** to **support** as it respects that many young people are already, in and outside of school community, actively involved in civics and citizenship leadership initiatives.

This comment also links with Paragraph 11 e) Rationale p5

‘Children in schools are citizens **but they need opportunities** to build their understanding and experience **to become active adult citizens**. The school plays an essential role in the provision of opportunities for preparing active, informed citizens to ensure the continuation of Australia’s parliamentary, liberal democracy.’

It is suggested that the first sentence is removed as it suggest that children are less informed and active as citizens than adults are.

The next sentence becomes the rationale point reading as

‘Through engaging with young Australians as active and informed citizens schools play an essential role in ensuring the continuation of Australia’s parliamentary, liberal democracy.’

This is important, as to think and do otherwise is to assume that younger Australians’ civic and citizenship world views, wisdom, values and dispositions are of a lower order than those of older Australians. When, we are aware of multiple times where young Australians (students) have taken the leadership role in major changes in their schools and communities. For example a school in which the students initiated and drew up a Reconciliation Action Plan that encompassed curriculum changes and linking with the local community’s Reconciliation group and then worked with the Head, teachers, parents and other students to make it a reality.

2. The paper provides strong statements and directions on the importance of civics and citizenship education in maintaining and growing a healthy Australian liberal democracy. For example the statements on ‘stewardship of the environment’; sustaining and improving natural and social environments’; and the important ‘role of civic and political activity in affecting sustainability’ are excellent.

However, the connection with sustainability and sustainable futures is mainly through association with current world views and values, influenced by our heritage, of civics and citizenship and liberal democracy rather than futures looking.

As such, there is an assumption that our current ways of seeing and engaging in civics and citizenship education and our liberal democracy will naturally lead to more sustainable futures.

There is no recognition of how key principles of sustainability, embedded in civics and citizenship, such as - intra/intergenerational equity; and the integration of short and long time decision making - , can influence and even change how we see and practice citizenship and therefore what we mean by Australia's liberal democracy.

For example - How can we include future generations in our decision making today?
How do we marry human laws with the 'laws' of nature?

It is recommended that in the development of the civics and citizenship curriculum guides the civics and citizenship principles are linked with associated sustainability principles as part of incorporating a futures civics and citizenship focus in all levels of the curriculum.

Yours sincerely



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