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ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION FOR TEACHERS:
RESPONDING TO THE AULICH REPORT IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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The Report of the Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training under the Chairmanship of Senator Terry Aulich, *Education for Active Citizenship in Australian Schools and Youth Organizations* (1989), recommended that "all higher education institutions with responsibility for teacher education ... ensure that education ... for active citizenship ... [is] a component in pre-service courses ..." (Recommendation 4.i). Respondents to the Report argued that political education was being taught by teachers who lacked political knowledge, skills and confidence to effectively teach students any curriculum aimed at developing active citizens. Students in teacher education courses were found to be politically uninformed even at the very basic levels and, as a consequence, politically apathetic. Their lessons were "dull, mechanical and often incorrect".

The Report eschewed the mere teaching of facts as being antithetical to the development of new attitudes towards citizenship education in a broad context. To validate some of the findings of the Report, and to determine the base knowledge of its student teachers, the Faculty of Education at Curtin University examined several classes using a simple knowledge recall test. This study reports the findings from a class of final year Bachelor of Education (Secondary) students in May 1990. The general findings were conveyed to the Senate Standing Committee and included in the Report *Active Citizenship Revisited* (1991).

The establishment of the Australian Electoral Commission in 1983 with a clear mandate to provide educational materials and to conduct research into electoral education, gave a boost to the development of curricula aimed at teaching young Australians about their political heritage and their rights as citizens. The findings of the Commission's Report into the abnormally high informal vote in the 1984 federal elections, suggested that politically more literate and informed citizens would benefit the political process. The then Federal Minister for Education, Senator Susan Ryan, in supporting political literacy, suggested that electoral education "should be a basic part of every child's education" (Ryan, 1985). The increasing activities of the Commission in the production of materials, ensured that teachers had an array of aids for classroom use. But it was not until the Education and Research Section of the Australian Parliament began to produce teaching kits such as the Parliament Packs, that the materials became student-friendly and encouraging enough for teachers to use. The Packs were made available to tertiary institutions for use in teacher education courses. The material was at once informative as to the parliamentary and electoral processes and, as well, an historical, social and cultural overview of Australia as an emerging and vibrant democracy. In crowded teacher education courses, the amount of time available to introducing the Packs remains limited and the students appear only marginally interested. There is little in the Australian educational system that compares with the overt inculcation of the symbols of the state and constitution as one finds in the United States (Phillips, 1989, p 7). Indeed, with the question of State's rights, the rivalries between States, and endless arguments about the anthem and the flag, building an image of Australianism can sometimes seem fruitless.

Helping children to become more politically aware is the task of the teacher. Overcoming the widely held prejudices that politics and politicians are the curse of one's life, is the first step. How to make it all interesting is the next. But how can any process begin when those very deficiencies in the young which the programs are addressing, are reflected in the teachers who are supposed to be presenting the materials? As Phillips (1989, p 20) has observed: "Without teacher expertise the best prepared syllabus in political education will not be effectively implemented". The recommendation that students in teacher education programs undertake political studies units to prepare them for such a task, may only exacerbate the problem. One need only to recall the seminal work of Connell (1971) in the late 1960s into the child's construction of politics, to see that children have already developed their political attitudes through family and peers even before they reach the stage of

formally learning about politics. But if the process of bringing about attitudinal change is not recognised, then, in the words of the Senate Standing Committee, "the situation revealed in this Report amounts to a crisis which Australians cannot afford to ignore" (1989, p 6).

In a truism, Reynolds (1991, p 9) remarks: "Knowledge about and attitudes to politics are not innate in human beings. [...] political awareness, knowledge and loyalties are acquired ... and that process of acquisition begins ... at birth". One might anticipate then, that final year university students would have done a great deal of acquiring in their twenty odd years. They do, after all, represent the elite of their generation having survived all the barriers to reach the home straight in the educational race. The Aulich Report (1989) however, raised doubts that teachers were any more electorally literate than the general population. It had been apparent for some time, that discussions with students about the constitutional restraints imposed by Section 51 on educational policy development at the Federal level and the use made of the anomalous Section 96, revealed a glaring lack of even basic knowledge about the Constitution. Aulich warned against the teaching and testing of political facts because the committee's perspective was for a broader notion of citizenship education. But, can teachers who have little knowledge base be confident in their teaching? It has been argued (Watts, 1990) that only when teachers have an assured knowledge base will they be able to work with the wider issues of citizenship education and the sensitive area of political education.

The Aulich Report has recognised that Australians generally have poor political knowledge skills. The relative failure of the educational system to provide those skills is, in part, a reaction to politics in the society at large (a little like the chicken and egg syndrome) and to the paucity of teacher knowledge. Where teachers have little or no knowledge skills of their own, one cannot expect the transmission will be positively effected. As has been indicated, the various developments in teacher materials has assisted in overcoming that teacher-knowledge gap. But it still requires motivation to use the materials and to reinforce positively the inherent values.

If a climate is to be created in which attitudinal change can be fostered among children, their teachers must themselves be at ease with the basic knowledge skills. Where that is not the case, the Report shows their ability to foster change is limited. They may, in fact, produce exactly the opposite result, passing on their own lack of interest and lack of understanding. Fundamental change in the teaching of basic knowledge skills of citizenship needs to occur.

Americans learn their knowledge skills as a regular feature of schooling; teachers are required to include such units of study in their college and university courses. Americans learn about the symbols of the state and the significance of the speeches, the people and the events of their democratic development. Australian political decisions may be more influenced by the snappy headline and the ten minute television expose. Those knowledge skills that Americans deem important enough to make compulsory at least provide a basis on which to build. The Committee has argued that traditionalist courses do not provide for attitudinal change; that they risk becoming a boring recitation of facts removed from the reality of what is going on in the society. But is trying to develop a positive attitude to responsible citizenship without the knowledge skills analogous to saying to a child "Let's begin with quadratic equations" before the child has a working knowledge of basic number facts?

So it is not without just cause that teacher education courses are targeted by the Report. The cycle of apathy has to be broken by an intervention wherever possible. Students reportedly (Watts, 1991) can name the first, the current and the prior Presidents of the United States yet have great difficulty with their Australian counterparts. Few students, it seems, can distinguish between the responsibilities of the various levels of government or between the chambers at state and federal level. Yet these are the people society is entrusting to pass on the knowledge necessary for understanding the democratic way.

It is pertinent to ask whether the valuing of a democratic society is dependent on understanding how the system works. It is the knowledge skills that form the foundation of that understanding and, it is argued, without such skills the person is prey to simplistic and populist manipulation. And there are some elements of knowledge skills that add that gut stirring emotionalism that makes one proud to be part of a long line of democratic tradition. It is unfortunate that Australia lacks a Gettysburg Address or a Churchillian speech that enshrines the values and forms the basis of, citizenship education.

Within that context, and as a means of determining the basic knowledge skills of a group of university students, a brief test was developed.

The Test

Any test in the area of citizenship knowledge can easily degenerate into a trivial quiz of the obscure. Equally, it can aim to determine the level of necessary factual knowledge as well as probe into understanding of government. The instrument consisted of twenty questions several with part answers. Students were asked to complete the questions in class taking about thirty minutes. Fifty students from the final year Bachelor of Education (Secondary) took part. The students were drawn from a variety of backgrounds including Industrial Arts, Fine Arts, Social Studies, English, Mathematics, Science and Business Studies. The results were a simple tally of the numbers of correct responses. The aim of the scoring was to gain an impressionistic picture of the students' knowledge.

The Results

Question 1

All (50) the students knew the name of the current Prime Minister, but, surprisingly, given the media coverage devoted to him, only 41 knew Paul Keating to be the then Deputy Prime Minister.

Question 2

However, when it came to the State politicians, the results were much less encouraging. While 44 could name Dr Carmen Lawrence as the Premier of Western Australia, less than half (22) could name Ian Taylor as the Deputy.

Question 3

The use of the term 'unicameral' was deliberate. Students were unable to answer because either they did not know what the term meant or they did not know that the Queensland Parliament consisted of only one House. In discussions with the students it was clear that for most, the term was unknown. Of the 17 who answered correctly, some indicated that they knew there was something unique about the Queensland Parliament and guessed that was what it might have been.

Question 4

Only slightly more than half the group could name the House of Representatives (28) and the Senate (27) as the two houses of the Australian Parliament. A few wrote Upper and Lower. It is cause for concern when supposedly well educated young university students do not know such basic facts, especially when most of the group voted in the 1990 elections.

Question 5

It is often said that Australians know more about American history than they do their own. But only 28 could identify Washington as the first President. MacArthur and Lincoln each received a few votes.

Question 6

The Governor-General has played a diminished role since 1975, but given the controversy surrounding his appointment, it was surprising that only 33 correctly identified Bill Hayden.

Question 7

There is something significant in the inability of Australians to respond positively to this period in their history. Memories of childhood learning about the struggle for Federation or the relief when it occurred, and could be forgotten, seem to have blanked out those first years of the new federal parliament. Only 11 students could name Edmund Barton, although a few named Alfred Deakin which is a common error. The responses do, however tenuously, support the myth that Australians know more about American history than their own since more than twice as many could name George Washington.

Question 8

Phillips (1989) noted that children were more receptive to their own history and institutions. Certainly more could name John Forrest as the first premier of Western Australia than could name Barton, but that may not be saying a great deal as only half were correct.

Question 9

This question was specifically aimed at testing a fact, Senate representation, that should be a part of the knowledge base of the teacher. That only 15 could correctly respond indicates the depth of

the problem.

Questions 10, 11 and 12

These three questions were designed to test the students' knowledge about the functions of government. The responses to the functions of social security (23), marriage and divorce (16) and registration of births and deaths (24) indicate the lack of awareness among the group. Many students today deal with the Department of Social Security, many have been to the Registrar's Office to get a birth certificate and some have had experience of the Family Law Courts. The community awareness of the levels of government and their respective functions has been commented on by those in social welfare. People become disenfranchised and powerless when they do not have the information that enables them to use the system. Or does it not matter that people do not know which level of government is involved so long as they receive the assistance for which they are looking? Since WA remains the only state to have established its own branch of the Family Law Court, one might expect confusion in that area.

Question 13

It is not surprising that Australians have agreed to so few constitutional changes through referendums. They are being asked to make judgements about a document that few have seen, few would know where to look to find it and fewer still understand it. Only 9 students in this group could explain the mechanism of the referenda. In discussion, few realised that the Parliament had to agree to the referendum before it went to the people.

Question 14

Phillips (1989) noted that the symbols of the State are not well known by Australians. The Commonwealth Star is no exception, though in discussion, once they knew what it was, the students could all identify the star and explain the significance of the seven points. Initially, only 19 could say what the star represented but 21 could identify at least one place where it could be found.

Question 15

In a time of increased national pride when green and gold seem to be everywhere, that only 34 could identify the official national colours was unusual. Some remembered the controversy when Malcolm Fraser wanted blue and yellow and those colours were used on road signs for the Bicentennial Road Programs. Others thought that red, white and blue were the official colours and that yellow and green were unofficial. Confusion still exists about the National Anthem for similar reasons.

Question 16

Again, the national symbols are not treated in Australia with the same reverence or mythology as they might be in the United States. The flag represents the extended colonialism Australia was prepared to accept (and still does) within the bosom of the Empire. Only 8 students correctly responded that the flag was officially recognised in the Australian Flag Act 1951.

Question 17

When did Australia gain its formal constitutional independence from the United Kingdom? The students were offered four dates - 1901 Federation; 1933 Statute of Westminster; 1944 Australia's accession to the Statute of Westminster; and 1986 the Australia Act breaking the last vestiges of constitutional links with the British Parliament. Only 4 correct answers resulted. Few students could make comments on any of the dates other than 1901 and even that was misconstrued as being the achievement of independence to an extent not contemplated by the Fathers of Federation. Most evidenced surprise at the date of the Australia Act and their lack of knowledge about its consequences.

Question 18

The inclusion of Forde provided the opportunity to talk about his term of office since few students had heard of him. Only 5 students could identify that Brown and Kingston had not been Prime Ministers of Australia. In discussion, it was clear that the majority of students had only a passing knowledge of Australian history. The Social Studies specialist were more confident as one would anticipate.

Question 19

Four mottoes were presented. 18 could recognise that the motto of Western Australia was Cygnis

insignis - under the sign of the swan. Most did know that the RAAF motto was *per adua ad astra* - through adversity to the stars. *Dieu et mon droit* - God and my right; and *Honi soit qui mal y pense* - evil to him who evil thinks, were recognised by many students though they did not know the meaning or the historical significance.

Question 20

19 respondents could identify their State electorate while 29 knew the Federal seat for which they were enrolled. There had been elections early in 1990 and a redistribution of electoral boundaries each of which should have served to heighten awareness of such basic knowledge. Are students any less apathetic than other groups in political awareness?

Conclusion

What emerges from this simple test is a picture of limited base knowledge among the very people who are given the task of increasing political literacy and of changing attitudes. Student teachers are no better equipped for the task than any other group in the society. Their political socialisation has occurred from the time of their birth and it is only marginally altered by the experiences of schooling even to the university level. Reynolds (1991, p 34) argues that the political socialisation of the adult is a more subtle process involving the acquisition of more detailed knowledge to augment observations about political frames of reference. It is the gradual changing of those frames of reference that enables the adult to weigh the consequences of political decisions and political operations. The impact of such change will vary according to the original data base available to the adult. What this simple test might show, is that the type of information revealed as lacking is either not regarded as a necessary part of the data base, or it is information not accessed because it has not yet been needed.

But can the society have confidence that electoral and parliamentary literacy is being addressed in its schools when teachers, if one generalises from such a small sample, may not have the essential base knowledge to carry it out?

The result of more sophisticated findings than this confirm the picture. But the question remains what to do about the problem that emerges? It would seem that there must be greater attention given to the development of cultural literacy at the Year 11 and 12 levels in the schools. Cultural literacy would encompass the broader aspects of citizenship including electoral literacy but also the cultural traditions that make up the Australian democracy. Having teachers able to teach such a program turns the issue squarely back to the universities and their Faculties of Education.

It is evident from all the submissions to the Senate Committee that the knowledge base of young Australians is deficient. The problem begs the question of compulsion in including those essential learnings in the curriculum. If intervention is needed to break the cycle of apathy and lack of knowledge, then it may be necessary to examine the teacher education program yet again to address the issue. Teacher education programs are constantly subjected to demands from interest groups to have included their particular subject. But are some subjects worth greater consideration? Is it in the national interest to ensure that new teachers at least, are equipped to bring about a positive attitudinal response to the responsibilities of citizenship?

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ED 511/310 ISSUES IN AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION

CITIZENSHIP QUIZ

This quiz is designed to test your knowledge of Australia's political system and matters relating to general facts for the Australian citizen.

1. Name the current Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Australia.

2. Name the current Premier and Deputy Premier of Western Australia.

3. Which Australian State Parliament is unicameral?

4. Name the two Houses of Federal Parliament.

5. Who was the first President of the United States?

6. Who is the current Governor-General of Australia.

7. Who was the first Prime Minister of Australia?

8. Who was the first Premier of Western Australia?

9. How many Members does each State elect to the Federal Upper House?

10. To which level of government would you go to seek help in regard to social security payments?

11. Which level of government controls marriage and divorce?

12. Which level of government controls the registration of births and deaths?

13. What rules govern a referendum to change the Australian Constitution?

14. Describe the Commonwealth Star, indicate what it represents and name one place where you will find it.

15. What are the official national colours of Australia?

16. Was the Australian National Flag made official in (Circle one)

1901? 1941? 1951? 1988?

17. Did Australia gain its formal constitutional independence from the United Kingdom in (Circle one)

1901? 1933? 1944? 1986?

18. Which TWO of these were NOT Prime Ministers of Australia? (Circle two)

Watson	Fisher	Hughes	Kingston
Cook	Menzies Holt	McEwan	
Brown	Forde	Bruce	Scullin

19. Is the motto of Western Australia (Circle one)

Cygnis insignia?
Per adua ad astra?
Dieu et mon droit?
Honi soit qui mai y pense?

20. Write down the names of the Federal and State electorates in which you are enrolled.

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