

THE CONSTRUCTION OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA:
SIR RICHARD BOYER
AND THE ROLE OF THE ABC

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Citizenship education in early to mid-twentieth century Australia took various forms. The creation of the Australian Federation as part of a British Imperial context had left in place a number of colonial legacies. Unlike the United States, whose population has also grown principally from immigration, the various Australian education state and non-state education systems had not developed any major formal programmes of civics education with particular attention to the study of the nature of political institutions. Rather, the concept of citizenship itself was ingrained into a number of practices across the formal and informal curriculum but also involving agencies and institutions beyond schools. Citizenship education was a general process of assimilation and incorporation of new citizens. For the most part this meant the young and the nature of this assimilation depended upon such variables as social class, gender and particularly ethnicity. By the mid-twentieth century it would also come to mean new arrivals, both adults and children.

The first part of the following paper attempts to outline the general pattern of citizenship education that had emerged in Australia by the end of the Second World War. As such it lays the foundation for a particular case study of one of the definite programmes of citizenship

education that emerged in the 1940s and 1950s with the major post-war immigration of settlers from various parts of Europe. Specifically, the focus in the second part of the paper is on the role of the media and the views of one particular individual whose own perceptions of citizenship had been in part created through the nature of his own education and experiences in the early twentieth century.

Citizenship Education and Social Class

The educational systems that had been created in nineteenth century Australia were part of the relations of social class in colonial society. Both the non-state male and female secondary Australian 'corporate schools' were founded on the ideal of the English public

schools. Here citizenship was closely related to the concept of leadership even though leadership roles were defined differently for males and females. (Bean, 1951; Sherington, Petersen and Brice, 1987).

Such curricula practices as religion as well as organised games and sport were designed to form the character and values of those who were seen as the future civic leaders. For many attending these schools in the early to mid-twentieth century such values became interpreted as service and commitment to what they saw as the national community. (McCalman, 1993). The allegiance of social class created its own ethic of citizenship even cutting across sectarian and religious boundaries. Thus during the First World War, a number of the products of the male corporate Catholic schools showed a commitment to the British Imperial cause which matched that of their counterparts from the Protestant corporate school sector. (Sherington and Connellan, 1987)

The state high school systems created throughout Australia from the late nineteenth century assumed a similar model of leadership training although it focussed more on an academic elite rather than a social elite. It was through the state high schools that many middle class and increasingly working class males and females entered the professions and commerce (Bessant, 1984; Campbell, 1994). In contrast, young working class males who left school to enter the blue collar workforce were caught up in the industrial citizenship of the trade union movement. Apprenticeship in particular provided its own form of working class education and entry into a masculinist culture. (Beilharz, 1992; Shields, 1993).

Citizenship Education and Gender

A number of practices in the schools and associated educational agencies emphasised that citizenship was gendered. One of the major divides in terms of gender was sport and physical education. For Australian males the culture of sport itself was a preparation for the necessary competition and co-operation of adult life. For females the citizenship function of sport in physical education was more

problematic, although it was justified more in terms of keeping girls fit for prospective motherhood. (Cashman, 1995). The construction of gender roles was even more marked in respect to preparing citizens to defend the nation. Masculinity was often closely associated with militarism. Thus the introduction of 'boy conscription' before the First World War provided universal cadet training for males aged twelve to eighteen. (Barrett, 1979). Even after the First World War the Commonwealth Government maintained support for school cadets and when Commonwealth financial support ended in 1929 a number of corporate and state secondary schools continued to maintain school cadet units.

Beyond school, there were also a number of voluntary agencies which maintained the development of citizenship education along gender lines.

Amongst these some of the most important were the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides. From the 1920s a number of State Governments had begun to sanction such bodies as agencies of citizenship education by enacting legislation to recognise them. (Sherington and Irving, 1989). These voluntary youth movements stressed a form of citizenship which inculcated values of order and discipline attempting to divert the young from habits which would bring them into trouble with the law while also preparing them for their role as future citizens. (Maunder, 1987).

Citizenship Education and Ethnicity

Of all the colonial legacies the divide between Irish-Australians of Catholic allegiance and those whose origins lay in the remainder of the

British Isles had most impact on the general development of citizenship education for the majority of the population. This ethnic and sectarian tension was expressed in a number of ways. It took the forms of a divide within the formal curriculum and practices of state and Catholic schools. Thus even the School Readers for state and Catholic children differed in content and purpose. In the state schools children learnt of Imperial British heroes and deeds; in the Catholic schools there were tales of Catholic martyrdom under British and Protestant tyranny. (Firth, 1972). The state-sponsored school magazines and papers, which emerged in the early twentieth century, attempted also to construct a view of Australian citizenship framed within a British Imperial context (Townsend, 1982).

The ethnic divide was also associated with symbolic forms and symbolic days. The debate over the Australian Flag which coincided with the establishment of Federation, would continue for over half a century. Many Australians of British-Protestant heritage continued to support the Union Jack as a proper symbol of Australian identity. Irish-Catholics became firm supporters of the Australian ensign. This difference was associated with conflict over the new forms of oaths of allegiance and flag ceremonies which were introduced into many state

schools. (Kwan, 1994). An associated divide developed in respect to Empire Day. The idea to celebrate the birthday of Queen Victoria as a celebration of Empire was first promoted in Canada. Its introduction as a school holiday in New South Wales led the Catholic hierarchy to nominate the same day, 25th May, as 'Australia Day' in the process also honouring the Virgin Mary whose Feast Day fell on the same date. (French, 1978; Firth and Hoorn, 1979). More generally, Irish -Australians often laid claim that they provided the basis of a new Australian identity in their schools and in their Church, rejecting the old ties of Empire so dearly held by many who held specific allegiance to England. (O'Farrell, 1987).

The divide between Catholic Irish-Australians and those of British Protestant descent also affected Australian of other ethnic background. The sectarian and ethnic tensions of the First World War helped lead to closure of state-supported German Lutheran language schools in South Australian and threatened the maintenance of the language elsewhere. By the 1920s there was a general Anglo-conformity in both immigration and settlement policy with implications for forms of citizenship education. The preferred immigrant was British while there was a particular focus on special schemes of child and youth migration from Britain. (Sherington, 1988). Conformity to English as the dominant language in both state and Catholic schools led a number of European ethnic communities into efforts to create their part-time school systems without state support.

The events of the Second World War helped re-shape some of the concepts of citizenship education. In contrast to 1914-18, the war of 1939-45 served to unite Australians more as a national community. The war and the prospect of post-war reconstruction also seemed to challenge some of the old divides on class and gender. There was now more discussion of the emergence of a modern democratic citizenship. During the War itself the introduction of such campaigns as National Fitness with a particular significance for Australian youth, served to provide a new model of citizenship based on local community life. (Irving, Maunders and Sherington, 1995). The old sectarian and ethnic divide between Catholics and Protestants, Irish and Anglo-Australians, also seemed less relevant.

The preparation for the post-war world would involve plans for increased immigration. There was now the prospect of a flood of

arrivals with little knowledge of Australia. At the same time, changing technology now provided new ways of providing education to these new citizens. Introduced into Australia during the inter-war year, radio had become a prime way of informing citizens during the War itself. Under the auspices of the Australian Broadcasting Commission it would become a major medium in the postwar citizenship education campaign.

Citizenship Education and the Role of the Media.

Case Study: Australian Broadcasting Commission - 'The Boyer Model'
(1945-1961).

Populate or perish, the cry of post World War II Australia, served as an impetus for the Federal Government to embark on an immigration programme on a scale unheard of in Australian annals. The massive number of non-British new settlers arriving on Australian shores prompted the Australian Government to seek avenues to facilitate its policy of citizenship education. Under the helm of A.B.C. Chairman, Sir Richard Boyer, (1945-1961), A.B.C. radio became an agency in articulating this policy and subsequently, an important tool in the education for citizenship of non-British new settlers.

Sir Richard's Values & Times

Sir Richard's conservative background influenced, significantly, his views on Australian citizenship and his interpretation of citizenship education. It was a reflection of his background in terms of social class, gender and ethnicity. Born the son of an English Clergyman at Taree, N.S.W. in 1891, he was educated at Sydney's exclusive Newington College. There he took his earliest interest in current affairs when controversy arose over whether Australia should contribute a destroyer to the Royal Navy. Young Boyer, enthused with imperial patriotism, wrote to the Sydney Morning Herald: "Let us put our hands in our pockets in our munificence of public spirit, give not one ship but a fleet of ships". The letter was published in the Herald no doubt to his father's pleasure who was a staunch British Empire man. (Bolton, 1967, p. 8). After a successful term at Newington, he went on to Sydney University where he excelled, graduating with an M.A. Honours in History.

He defined his philosophy as, "the faith of an Australian Liberal". (Inglis 1983 p. 128.) He fundamentally believed: "There were ethical standards of behaviour for politics and society, and that since men's interests and needs differed too widely to be satisfied by any single code of dogma, the surest guide to these ethical standards was conscience acting by the light of reason rather than the traditions of authority". His biographer, Geoffrey Bolton, believed these views reflected Sir Richard's Protestant background, as did his faith in education, as a means of developing a sound judgment in private and public conduct. (Bolton, 1967, p. 12).

His early inclinations were to follow his father's footsteps and he briefly served as chaplain at the Royal Military College at Duntroon. When World War I broke out, he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces but was invalided out in 1918. The war experience created division between 'two kinds' of Australians:

There were the British-Australians unchanged in their imperial loyalty; predominantly middle-class, Protestant and politically conservative; and there were those who in varying degrees had rejected, outgrown, forgotten or simply had never known the British inheritance. To this

second group, which might be called the Indigenous Australians, belonged a large part of the working class, most Irish Catholics, the children of European immigrations.....The two groups had been at loggerheads during the war - over conscription, the merits of the war and the right to strike - and relations could hardly be said to have improved with peace.....Australia was shaken during 1919 by outbreaks of political and industrial violence which further estranged the British and Indigenous Australians.

(Souter, 1992, p. 281).

Sir Richard would no doubt be slotted into the first group. In fact, imperial support bore some relationship to socio-economic position, existing to some extent at all levels, but was stronger at the top echelons of society and weaker at the bottom.

As a consequence of war service, poor health made it advisable for Sir Richard to settle in the country. (Palmer, 1957, p. 20.) For 20 years he successfully enjoyed establishing a grazing property in Queensland. When offered an appointment to the Australian Broadcasting Commission in 1940, he eagerly accepted it and in 1945, was appointed Chairman. He remained in that post until his death in 1961, only a few weeks before his retirement.

Events surrounding not only the Great War but also World War II played a role in his enthusiasm in working towards the assimilation of non-British new settlers into Australian citizens.

In particular:

(1)The impact of the Government's policy of population growth which was launched by the Labor Government but also pursued vigorously by the succeeding Menzies Government.

(2)The Cold War between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. and their allies which was seen as a struggle between liberal democratic capitalism and communism.

(3)Fear of the impact of the American Way of Life and Australia's adoption of the U.S as its model.

(4)The transformation of Australia into a modern industrial society with a burgeoning middle class, urbanisation and the 'new consumerism'.

Sir Richard represented Australia at various international forums. His

diplomatic skills served him in maintaining a harmonious working relationship with both Labor and Liberal leaders. He held the post of President of the Australian Citizenship Conventions where favourable reference was made to the A.B.C.'s active involvement in citizenship education. The Citizenship Conventions were attended by Anglo-Australians who were leading figures in Australian community life. They acted as forums for discussion and dissemination of information essentially pertaining to the assimilation of non-British new settlers and were held to promote a nation-wide movement towards a deeper appreciation of the privileges and obligations of Australian citizenship.

He was also President of the Good Neighbour Council of N.S.W. As Chairman of the A.B.C. and through such associations, he worked with other national leaders as part of a general campaign in the construction and promotion of citizenship education. Notably, the foundations of citizenship education and its aims were being directed from 'the top down'.

Radio - The Image-Maker

By the post World War II period, radio had established itself as a powerful image-maker. Sir Richard often said that the radio was an even more revolutionary device than the internal combustion engine. (Inglis, 1983, p. 128). He maintained that the A.B.C. had a distinctive role to play in broadcasting, and distinguished itself from commercial stations, in that one of its primary functions was to educate the listener.

The A.B.C. also had vestiges of imperial trappings and was an important vehicle in maintaining cultural links with Britain. It was borne of the B.B.C. and was considered an 'Empire Station', each year carrying the Royal Christmas address and Empire Day broadcasts. Enthusiastically, Postmaster General, the Hon. J. Fenton, alleged that under the Empire broadcasting system, it would be possible for "naked blacks" to listen-in, in the jungle, to the world's best operas. (Alomes, 1988, p. 75).

Central to the A.B.C.'s 'educative function', was Sir Richard's belief that it was imperative to build a nation based on democratic principles and work towards national unity. This view prompted his enthusiasm to educate non-British new settlers in the ways of Australian citizenship.

In 1950, Sir Richard's article, "The ABC and National Unity", promoted the building of a nation based on democratic ideals and national unity. He expressed concern, that in a democracy a fundamental problem was to preserve a sense of unity with a common destiny while at the same time enjoying factional fights and individual peculiarities of action. The

A.B.C., he asserted, had a role to play in contributing to national unity through its broadcasts to non-British new settlers. (A.B.C. Weekly 1950, p. 29).

Australian Citizenship - Obligations and Rights

A few years later, Sir Richard's mission to promote democratic ideals was again revealed in his address on the privileges and responsibilities of Australian citizenship delivered to non-British new settlers taking the oath of allegiance. He emphasised the importance of these new settlers becoming naturalised Australians, living in a free and democratic society and told them that they were now a part of the British Commonwealth which was a world-wide brotherhood. (Australian Archives N.S.W. 1954, p. 2).

Some of the new citizens, he continued, had come from countries which for years had been republics but now found themselves with a Queen who he considered was, "the pinnacle of a true democracy...she is the guardian of our democracy...In our British sense the Monarchy has found its strength, its permanence and its claim in our loyalty chiefly in goodness". (Australian Archives N.S.W. 1954, p. 2).

Australian citizenship, he asserted, meant that citizens should take their part in determining the policy of this country; in laying firm foundations for its future; by keeping civic and national life clean; giving voluntary service without thought of reward to help those in distress. It meant an unrelenting struggle against the lowering of Australia's ethical standards, helping the nation to be tolerant, standing firmly by those freedoms without which nothing was worthwhile.

He emphasised that Australians were still young enough to mould this land to their heart's desire and that those now being naturalised had a part to play in that moulding. (Australian Archives N.S.W. 1954, p.

3).

Clearly, Sir Richard's speech was aimed at cultivating feelings of pride and patriotism within the hearts of the new citizens. It promoted the view that they were privileged, becoming Australian citizens in a free land and, one closely linked to the British family of nations.

Citizenship Education - Goals

The arrival of the millionth postwar migrant in the mid fifties marked a milestone in the immigration programme. Sir Richard told delegates at the 1956 Citizenship Convention that Australia had reached a point in its history as its migrant programme was far in advance of anything yet experienced. He added that Australians were now looking at this problem (concerning Australia's migration programme) not so much in

terms of an economic balance sheet as in terms of Australia's long term nationhood. Sir Richard reinforced the view of Australia's Governor General, Sir William Slim: "Always in the back of your minds keep this country British, Democratic and Christian". (Digest 1956, p. 31).

However, the 'crimson thread of kinship', a genetic reality, which Sir Henry Parkes said has been flowing through virtually all Australians, was now being diluted. In 1901 more than 98% of Australia's population was of English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh descent. In the aftermath of World War II, non-British new settlers were reaching Australian shores in unprecedented numbers. Between October 1945-1961, 887,533 non-British long term and permanent settlers arrived on Australian shores. (Australian Immigration Quarterly, Statistical Bulletin 1961, p. 14).

These new settlers arrived with their 'cultural baggage'. It was considered, however, that Australia's British identity was not to be challenged. Australia was to remain a 'Britain in the South Seas'. Minister for Immigration, A. Townley, stressed to delegates attending the 1957 Citizenship Convention: "Ours is...a British country and we have a degree of kinship with the 'old country' which we do not have with other countries no matter how highly we regard individual new citizens from those other countries". (Digest 1957, p. 8).

In support, Sir Richard told delegates that Australians should not forget their British cultural heritage, despite the novelty of the 'cultural baggage' transported by new settlers from Europe:

We should not underestimate the real cultural values of our Australian life. We should never forget that our assimilation objective is...that he (non-British new arrival) is finding his comfort and well being in a community which is distinctively Australian. He continued: "Every Good Neighbour Council should be a centre...of enthusiasm for Australia's British inheritance and the Australian characteristic drafted on to that inheritance...". (Digest 1957, p. 25).

Perhaps Sir Richard visualised the tremendous impact the process of cultural fragmentation would have in changing Australian society in the aftermath of World War II and imagined that Australia would ultimately evolve from a British based society into one culturally diverse? Subsequently, he saw citizenship education as a means of working towards national unity in a culturally mixed society.

The current debate about Australia being transformed into a Republic

prompted Prime Minister Keating to appoint a Civic Expert Group to prepare a programme for public education on a number of issues

including Australian citizenship as a means of fostering a core of unity in a diverse society.

(Jenkins, 1995, p. 1). Despite similarities, Sir Richard may not have been prepared for the current dramatic Republican push and, as Tom Keneally, a prominent member of the Australian Republican Movement, put it, "the Republic is part of the mechanism of our national deliverance".

(Keneally 1993 Introduction.)

Nevertheless, Sir Richard's perception of citizenship education could simply be equated with overcoming the non-British new settlers' ignorance about the Australian way of life and learning to become 'Australianised'. This raises two fundamental questions. For Sir Richard, what did 'distinctively Australian' mean and how was this ideal to be cultivated? Undoubtedly, he vigorously supported the view that the Australian characteristics were essentially British. Further, that the building upon this British inheritance was fundamental to Australia's future prosperity and vital to the growth of a greater nation in the post war world.

Citizenship Education - A.B.C. Programmes

A variety of programmes were introduced to help convert the non-British new settlers into 'well rounded' Australian citizens. In 1949, the first programme went to air entitled, "For New Australians". It was broadcast over national stations every Saturday and Sunday mornings and a booklet, setting out programme content was published monthly and available from A.B.C. offices State-wide. (A.B.C. Weekly 1949, p. 13).

The programmes were prepared in collaboration with the Commonwealth Office of Education and the Department of Immigration. Emphasis was on learning English. Background to the Australian way of life was also incorporated into the broadcasts. In 1950, an instructive serial entitled, "In a Sunburnt Country" was introduced followed by "Happy to Know You". In the latter programme, the broadcaster, Keith Smith, chatted to new settlers about their experiences in Australia. "Making Friends" was also introduced which was aimed at the non-British females.

Ten years after its first printing, the booklet, For New Australians, still centred around learning English grammar and pronunciation. The number of booklets distributed also kept pace with the number of non-British new settlers and seemed to peak in the mid fifties around the time of the arrival of the millionth newcomer when there seemed to be a push to make 'them' more like 'us'.

Programmes were periodically reassessed and revised. The arrival of the millionth postwar migrant led to a review of A.B.C. programmes for migrants. It was considered that there was a need to change the

format of "Happy to Know You" as in the early years it was fairly straight forward propaganda for assimilation. It was believed at the Australian Broadcasting Commission that the programme now needed to be presented more subtly for the migrants who had been here for years - and for the general Australian audience if they were not to be driven away. Further, that any proposed changes should be fully explored as there were policy questions involved and it was important for the Australian Broadcasting Commission to continue to do all that could be done to assist in the migration project. (Australian Archives N.S.W. 1951-58).

Problems concerning the reconstruction of the Sunday Programme in the mid fifties resulted in Sir Richard's intervention. He wrote to Mr. T. Heyes, Secretary, Department of Immigration, saying that the changes to the Sunday programme were designed to assist still further in the assimilation of non-British new settlers. He added that a serial story based on migrant experiences has been included in accordance with a request made through the Citizenship Convention in Canberra. He concluded by stressing that the A.B.C. took very seriously its contribution to the effective assimilation of migrants. (Australian Archives N.S.W. 1954).

Conclusion

Thus, the overall thrust of the campaign by the A.B.C. under the direction of Sir Richard remained unaltered with the accent weighing heavily on the point of transforming the non-British new settlers into Australian citizens. As Chairman of the A.B.C., his vision was to take practical shape and the Australian Broadcasting Commission became a powerful tool in disseminating the message. That is, the importance of building a British bastion founded on democratic ideals and working towards national unity.

Sir Richard's life characterised the traditional values of British colonialism. His approach in dealing with the massive influx of non-British new settlers was primarily influenced by his British Empire heritage, love of the land, education and pastoral outlook. A.B.C. radio could be seen as the 'voice piece' of his Ministry and his subjects, the post war non-British new settlers of a war torn Europe. His message was based on the values of the 'mother country', mixed with the rugged individualism of the new homeland.

Sir Richard, the early 20th century male, a Methodist-Protestant, enjoyed a privileged status of a social class imbued with private English school values and a select university education. 'For King or Queen and Country', or 'Rule Britannia' rolled easily off the lips of the few who were afforded these opportunities. Citizenship education emphasised new ways and new loyalties for the recent arrivals to

engender. Sir Richard's intention was to educate and inform to such a degree that reason and morality would pave the way for the new settler/citizen. In hindsight, the citizenship education of the 1950s showed a bias of British colonial heritage that had for too long carried a banner in the face of other factions, most notably the Irish Catholics.

However, Sir Richard, was a conservative caught in a changing tide. The one going out, with Australia's close ties to Britain, and the one coming in, with a blend of Americanism, new world consumerism and Australia's adventure into cultural diversity. More recently, at a reception for the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh, Prime Minister Keating said: "...we have all changed in that time (the forty years of the Queen's reign)...This is an altogether different generation, reflecting the profound change in our two countries and the relationship between them...Our outlook is necessarily independent...". (Keneally, 1993, p. 195).

As Australia approaches maturity and the year 2001, one may wonder how Sir Richard would have dealt with Australia's transformation into a Republic and advanced media technology. I would say that Sir Richard's earlier spoken words, "that Australians were still young enough to mould this land to their heart's desire and, that those being naturalized had a part to play in that moulding", will come back to

haunt him in a fashion he may never have expected.

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