Civic Understanding and Political Attitudes

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Abstract

This paper reports some of the findings of a study of the Political Attitudes of Year 11 Victorian students undertaken in 1997. Some background to the study is outlined, with an emphasis on the concerns associated with the Civics Expert Group's Report, Whereas the People..., and subsequent government policy. The research context of the study was a paucity of detailed work on student political attitudes, and the conclusion of a substantial international study, whose instrumentation and findings were made available to the writer, a researcher at ACER. The methodology of the study and analyses undertaken are outlined.

The student responses on the scales of Political Interest, Political Trust, Political Efficacy are reported and are considered in the light of the student responses on the Classroom Climate scale. Some interpretations of these scales, in combination, are offered, and some conclusions as to the implications for pedagogy in citizenship education in general, and the Discovering Democracy policy in particular, are considered.
Background

This study was developed as a result of the decision of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) that it wished to make a significant contribution to the substance and focus of the debate which had arisen as a result of policy initiatives, begun by the Commonwealth government when it appointed the Civics Expert Group in June 1994.

Concerns about Whereas the People..., and Policy

Within the interested ‘academic’ press there was criticism from several quarters and on several counts. (Curriculum Perspectives:1996, Yates:1995.)

The most disappointing aspect of this latest Report is that there is little discussion about the conceptual elements which might be considered to constitute citizenship education and therefore little acknowledgment about the assumptions and values embedded in the Report.

... (It has) an external obligatory mode which encourages consent rather than dissent, which is strong on verbal adherence to principles rather than actual behaviour and which is national and particularistic rather than universal and transnational. (Prior:1996)

Much of the concern related to the emphasis of the bulk of the recommendations being on implementation procedures for this proposed civics learning and only five recommendations focussing on the conceptual nature of citizenship education.

The government of the day collected written responses to Whereas the People... and in June 1995 published its policy initiative, which supported all the recommendations, and allocated twenty five million
dollars to the schools’ aspects of the initiative. This resulted in
the acceptance of the Curriculum Corporation as the appropriate
mechanism to carry the materials development, with 10.6 million dollars
funding.
By early 1996 the Curriculum Corporation had contracted papers from
academics and other practitioners. (eg. Mellor and Elliott: 1996) The
hope that this process was the beginning of a theoretical discussion,
proved not to be the case, and the 75 papers have not been published.
They have therefore not fulfilled their potential for impact on the
issues under debate.
Research into Student Political Knowledge and Attitudes
From a research perspective, little was known about student civics
understandings and attitudes, and it was desirable to augment that
knowledge before the various curriculum policies were fully realised,
and implemented.
The results of an ANOP poll, conducted to complement the Civics Expert
Group’s work in the academic and general communities, were published in
Whereas the People.... This poll drew on the definitions and
understandings of civic knowledge which had been integral to earlier
popular reports and which had gained acceptance as indicators of those
knowledges which were thought to be a pre-requisite to competent
participation in the Australian political system. (Whereas the
People...:Appendix 3)
A number of clusters of assumptions were evident in the analysis and
discussion of the results of the poll, which indicated a poor
knowledge, in adults, as well as young people of 15 to 18 years, as to
the mechanisms of government. But the assumptions made about the linkages which were deemed to be self-evidently existing between this poor knowledge, and low rates of participation in political activity (a major concern of the writers of Whereas the People...) were not proven. Also not proven were the assumptions that a civics curriculum would result in students having an increased knowledge or understanding of the political processes which govern them. The third cluster of assumptions centred on the view that students were apathetic because they did not know and understand important things because they had not been taught. The corollary of this was that, once taught, they would see the necessity of participating in the political processes, and would be more inclined to do so.

All these reports inferred understandings about student political attitudes. Some research had been undertaken, but the scale and design of the samples did not allow broad generalisations about whole populations. (Phillips:1995, Doig et al:1994) Because student political attitudes had not been comprehensively investigated, assertions regarding them remained uncertain. Thus in early 1996, the decision was taken to conduct a study into student political attitudes, using an ACER developed questionnaire.

The ACER study was built upon the work of an internationally recognised American researcher, who was then completing the field work for a ten year research study investigating the political attitudes of students in late secondary school in five democratic countries. The data Carole L. Hahn had collected was therefore comparative in methodology and approach, and could readily accommodate additional research. The items
on the questionnaire had been validated.

The international context provided by the Hahn study, in which the
demonstrated Victorian political attitudes can be examined, enriches
and strengthens the interpretations which can be made of the Victorian
data. The international component of the data results in a more
rounded picture of the political attitudes the Victorian students have,
and the usefulness of such a report as this is correspondingly
increased.

Methodology

In this exploratory study, the modified Hahn questionnaire was
administered to Year 11 students in a range of Victorian secondary
schools, in order to collect data on generic student political
attitudes. Additional school data were also collected, to assist in
interpreting student questionnaire responses.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument consisted of four parts: Part 1 is a 55 item
questionnaire. Parts 2, 3 and 4 contain questions to which a range of
different kinds of responses are sought. Different questions in each
part contribute to scales which tap student attitudes on

Classroom Climate,

Political Interest, (plus Past and Future Political Activities)

Political Trust,

Political Efficacy,

Political Confidence,

Equal Political Rights for Women, and

Political Tolerance, (incorporating Free Expression and Civic Rights).
Each of the scales used in the Hahn instrument had been empirically validated by Hahn. The reliability statistics on the ACER data also proved satisfactory.

Questionnaire Modification

The Hahn instrument was modified in order to situate it in an Australian context. The changes made were generally naming changes; such as the substitution of the names of particular groups which did not have currency in Australia, with the names of groups which have or represent equivalent or similar goals or characteristics as those being replaced. Examples of these changes are: League of Rights for Ku Klux Klan/ National Front, Local for City, Aborigines & Asians for Blacks/ Pakistanis/ Refugees/ Foreign Workers.

Trialing

The initial modifications were tested in the trialing of the instrument with a group of end of year 10 students who attended a school where they had just finished a politics unit. Further modifications followed, which involved the construction of a worksheet, with examples from each section of the questionnaire.

Sample Selection: Students and Schools

The non-random sample for the study was 633 Year 11 students from 6 schools (4 Government, 1 Catholic and 1 private). The selected schools in the ACER study represent a range of school types which is indicative of the breadth of school types existing in the whole State's school community. In selecting the schools, it was important to seek schools with differing attitudes and ethos, as well as different populations. There was an assumption that with these differences being addressed in
the school selection, some differences in student attitudes, across
schools, would also be captured by the study. However it was also
important that the differences tapped in the sample did not become
distorted by the selection of a school which had a curriculum which
differed significantly from the norm.

Students at Year 11 were selected as an appropriate cohort as a result
of a number of factors. The Hahn cohort was aged primarily from 16 to
19. The ages of Year 11 students best match this range. The average
age of the Victorian sample was 16 years. Students in Year 11 are
still at a stage of their schooling where a range of choice of subjects
can be made. Many of the cohort would be approaching the age where
they are eligible to vote. Students in this age group are more likely
to have measurable political attitudes than those in the earlier years
of school.

The six schools had different kinds of populations and demonstrated
somewhat different priorities in their goals. The ways in which they
exercised these priorities are demonstrated through the policies they
adopted. The straitened times in which all schools now operate,
routine fiscal tightness for them and their 'clients' reduces the
diversity of programs. This impacts negatively on the climate for
experimentation and constitutes a reality with which all schools now
must try to comes to terms.

The six schools demonstrate a range of policy responses to the task of
involving students in the life of the school. Some of them assert
student participation as a higher priority than others. The problems
of the slippage that occurs between policies and the implementation, in
a range of policy areas, is common to them all. This is no criticism of the schools, rather a recognition that implementation frequently does not follow from policy development, and that it is not always as a result of lack of will, but lack of funding and insufficient time to follow through on the initiatives.

Finally, the six schools demonstrate the range of curriculum emphases which can exist within schools. However the SOSE (Studies of Society and the Environment) curriculum experience of recent times in Victorian (not to say Australian) schools is demonstrated by these schools, and it has been one of the reduction of hours on the timetable. The pressure on the curriculum in all Victorian schools to expand to include the full range of the Key Learning Areas mandated in the Curriculum Standards Framework (1995), has resulted in less time for some subjects. SOSE has become an integrated Learning area, combining History, Geography, Politics and Environmental Studies. In addition, they generally present on the timetable as an integrated curriculum, no longer as separate subjects. For all these reasons, students are now less likely than they would have been in the late 1980s or at any time before that, to experience any of these subjects in each year of their secondary schooling.

The SOSE curriculum suffers from the general perception that it is not 'job-useful' for students. Fewer than ever students study history and other social studies subjects, especially in the post-compulsory years, where curriculum choices are made with fewer restrictions, by students. They are seen as the less useful subjects, by students and teaching staff. In this climate, schools are unlikely to decide, alone, to
expand their offerings to include civics or citizenship curricula. In 1997 Victoria, it would be a very unusual school which had a SOSE curriculum which offered politics or an active participatory curriculum, or an issues-based curriculum in the middle years of the school. To have included such a school in the sample would have been to distort it, though to have data from such a school, for comparative purposes, would be fascinating. The selected schools are no different to the majority, though School 1 had kept an unintegrated SOSE until the year of the study. Therefore few of the students in the cohort had done more than a couple of semesters' of SOSE subjects in their previous four secondary years of school. Sequential learning in the area was impossible. Yet the field is the one which most easily encompasses the issues, skills and interests addressed by this study, and to which the new Civics curricula initiatives are directed.

Data Collection

School Discussions

Once in the schools, the data collected regarding school ethos and participation practices, was achieved through discussions with administrators and the collection of relevant documentation. Attending meetings of staff and/or students, where the agendas were relevant to the areas being explored, was also accomplished. Formal and informal discussions with staff and students occurred.

Questionnaire and Worksheet Administration

In the administration of the questionnaire instrument in the six schools, the worksheet was done by students before the whole questionnaire was handed out and completed. It seems students found it
helpful to do the worksheet first. It acted as a sensitisier for the
format and substance of the questionnaire, without impacting on the
attitudes which were to be recorded. The questionnaires were
administered by the researcher with students who were either in whole
Year 11, or in smaller class groupings.

Student Discussions

The discussions with students after they had completed the
questionnaire were affected by the size of the group, levels of
interest in the issues, the time left for talking and students'
demonstrated ability to engage in discussion with a stranger in a
reasonable way. Staff were generally present at these discussions and
some took part in them. The chief drift of the questioning by the
researcher was about the ways and degree to which the students thought
their school allowed or encouraged them to practice some participation
in decision-making in the school.

Predictably, the discussion was frequently noisy and critical of school
policies. The researcher emphasised the need to provide evidence or
examples to support the assertions which were being made, and this was
achieved. Having the students clarify their position was frequently as
important as the initial expression of their opinion. Students were
able to accept the constraints within which their schools operated.

But the paucity of meaningful participation structures was identified
by the students as a reflection of the attitudes teachers and
administrators had about the rights of students. This was an attitude
of which they did not approve.

With such a sample and methodology, no claims of legitimate statistical
inference or generalisability to the Victorian or Australian population can be asserted. The kinds of claims being made are illuminative, but not conclusive of the broader populations, either the student or school.

Questionnaire Analysis

Factor analyses were conducted on the items, grouped in the predetermined attitudes scales, in Part 1 and Part 4 (a-i). Cronbach alphas were run and reliability ratings were found to be strong. A five-step response scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Uncertain, Agree, Strongly Agree) was used in eight of the ten scales. On this response scale a response of 'strong disagreement' scored 1, 'disagreement' scored 2, 'uncertain' scored 3, 'agreement' scored 4 and 'strong agreement' scored 5. It was reduced to a three-step scale, by combining the two extremity measures, and frequency distributions by items were obtained. The findings per item, as reported on each of the attitude scales, are the percentaged responses on the three-step scale. They are reported as High (corresponding to Strongly Agree and Agree), Medium (corresponding to Uncertain) and Low (corresponding to Disagree and Strongly Disagree) ratings. Means and standard deviations were also calculated, using the five-step scale, for each of the attitude scales, and these are used to report in a more generalised way on students' political attitudes, and to make some international comparisons. A similar process of reduction of categories was conducted on the items
in Parts 2 and 3 of the questionnaire: Political Experience and Future

Political Experience. Here there were four response categories for
students to use and these were reduced to two. For Part 2, the Low
rating corresponds to the responses 'Definitely Not' and 'Not Very
Likely', and the High rating corresponds to the responses 'Somewhat
Likely' and 'Very Likely'. For Part 3 the Low rating corresponds to the
responses 'Not at All' and 'Weekly' for question 1, and to the
responses 'Never' and 'Hardly Ever' for the remaining questions. The
High rating for question 1 corresponds to the responses '2-3 times per
week' and 'Daily', and for the remaining questions it corresponds to
the responses 'Sometimes' and 'Very Often'.

For the four open-ended questions in Parts 3 and 4, student responses
to open-ended questions were recorded as frequencies against the
categories generated by the researcher, as suggested by student
response.

Ninety percent or more of students responded to most questions, and
between-school differences were analysed. Analysis of differences in
responses by gender was undertaken for all items. The gender
differences are deemed significant where a consistent pattern of
difference is found or where the difference in response rate has a
magnitude of greater than five per cent. Whilst a number of
interpretations can be offered regarding the gender differences in the
Victorian data, they could only be speculative. Any further
interpretation would need to reference the research and debate on the
different ways in which male and female students operate and relate in
class, in school or in the political sphere.
Political Experience and Political Interest

A: Political Experience

The findings as to the actual political experiences of these Victorian students are an initial focus. Only by knowing as much as possible about their background in the realms of political activity will we be able to ascertain how they came to their attitudes.

In this section of the questionnaire, Part 3, students are not asked questions of opinion, but ones of information. It is factual, rather than attitudinal, data being sought. The items asked the students about the sources of their information on politics and their previous political activities. They were asked to rate the frequency of their 'political' activities by selecting one of four response categories.

The information will bear on our understanding of students' sources of political information, other than school, and on the level and type of political activity they have engaged in, up to this time. The frequencies of student responses are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Victorian Responses to 'Political Experience' Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Rating</th>
<th>High Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

How frequently do you use the news media to learn about public affairs,
current events and political issues?

Television
27
73

Newspapers
46
54

Radio
52
48

When you use the media (TV, newspapers, radio), which types of news do you follow?

International news
28
72

National news
12
88
Local news
15
85

Sport news
27
73

How often do you discuss current events and politics with your parents?
60
40

How often do you discuss current events and politics with your friends?
75
25

How often do you discuss current events and politics in your classes in school?
42
58

Have you ever worn a button for a candidate for political office?
95
5
Have you ever helped a candidate for political office by doing things for him or her? (For example, handing out leaflets, buttons, or bumper stickers with the candidate's name on them?)

95

5

Have you ever been an office-holder in a club, a form captain, a prefect, or a representative to a student council?

64

36

Have you ever been belonged to any school team or group?

28

72

Have you ever collected for a charity?

53

47

Note: The Low rating corresponds to 'Not at All' and 'Weekly' and the High rating corresponds to '2-3 times per week' and 'Daily'.

In response to the question How frequently do you use the news media to
learn about public affairs, current events, and political issues the Victorian students revealed that they used television much more than any other form of the news media as a source of information about current affairs. In this they are similar to the other international students. But they are more like the non-American students in that they use the newspapers more than they do radio. The level of rating is small compared to all other students, with the Victorian High rating being in excess of 15 per cent lower for all three parts of the question than for the international students.

The responses of students suggest a low level of activity, and they are considerably lower than the levels of activity which Hahn found in her five nation cohort. These are the very kinds of social cementing activity which schools espouse, though the schools in the sample varied somewhat in their practical encouragement of such activities. There were not great between school differences in the student responses. Clearly the students do not view these activities as interesting, possibly not important, to them.

Reference is made in Whereas the People (1995) to the way so many of these socially cementing activities are the province of women.

Overall, the gender differences demonstrated across the whole of the scale were slight, but this greater respect for, and involvement in, these activities, as demonstrated by females in the larger community, is replicated in the gender difference in the student responses on this scale. For example, the female High rating response on this last political activity item is 56 per cent, which is 18 per cent larger than the equivalent male response. However this still leaves us with
44 per cent of the female students and 62 per cent of male students maintaining they have not had the collecting for charity experience, reinforcing the previous comments. Whereas the People (1995) reports a singular concern to recognise and promote the civic and social importance of these political/civic kinds of activities and urges us to more highly value the activities which arise from them.

The latter section of Part 3 contained several open-ended questions. The first of these, question 11, asks which classes you are most likely to discuss issues, current events, or politics? Table 2 documents the Victorian students’ responses. It illustrates the paucity of formal citizenship or political curriculum these Year 11 students experience in their schooling. English is a compulsory subject in Year 11, thus 100 per cent of students are enrolled. It is generally an issues-based course. Fifty six per cent of the students respond that these issues are mostly frequently discussed in their English classes. To ask the English courses and their teachers to carry the bulk of this specific curriculum responsibility is to place a distraction into their work which many teachers may not think sound or for which they may not feel adequately pedagogically prepared.

The infrequency of the selection of the SOSE curriculum choice may be confirmation of the small number of students in the learning area (given that curriculum choices can be made at Year 11), or it may be that the Year 11 curriculum does not include such material. Given that SOSE teachers are probably the best-prepared in their pre-teacher training for this kind of curriculum (and possibly also for the participatory pedagogy), these figures represent a waste of teaching
resources.

Note that these figures are no indication as to the frequency or proportion of the subject classtime spent in these activities.

Clearly, none of the schools feel that such studies are a natural part of any other of the curriculum areas, else they would appear more than they do. The gender differences are interesting, but no hypotheses for them can be reasonably offered. The similarity of the gender responses as to the use of English classes is self-validating.

Table 2: Percentage Victorian Responses for Discussion of Issues, Current Events and Politics by Subject, with Male and Female responses on each item

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Studies</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study of Society and the Environment SOSE</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues (in sub-school or cross age group)</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/PE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost all or any subject</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Arts</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (including 'None')</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: There were 33 missing cases for this item (5 per cent of the cohort). 31 per cent of those who responded gave more than one
example, but only the first response was included in the analysis.

Question 12 asked students to give an example of an issue which you would consider controversial. Table 3 shows the students' responses, in an edited form.

Three quarters of the students were able to identify an issue they regarded as controversial. The list has been reduced in size, by combining the issues into more general categories, or into "Others". The list has been left extensive because of the insights it offers into students' perception of what constitutes a controversial issue, and because of the gender differences which remain visible.

As with so much of the attitudes material, these responses may embody more than one attitude. For example, does the variation between the selected issues indicate that the students regard some as more controversial than others, or are they merely suggesting they would be good topics to discuss? Does the gender difference on euthanasia and racism indicate that one gender consider it more important than the other? Or are they suggesting that they are issues which society has not resolved, so they would like the opportunity to discuss them? Are the girls indicating that they want abortion to be discussed as part of an airing of the boys lack of understanding of aspects of the issue, or are they saying they think changes to abortion legislation should be canvassed (or both)? Are the boys saying that they regard it as unimportant to them? Whilst no firm conclusions on these questions can be drawn, they are all questions to which teachers and schools should be wanting to know or provide the answers, for their student cohort.
Table 3: Percentage Victorian Responses for Discussion of Issues considered Controversial with Male and Female responses on each issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Controversial Issue</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Euthanasia</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism/immigration</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental issues</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.6

Genetic engineering
3.4
3.9
3.6

Gay rights
2.0
5.0
3.6

School issues
3.1
3.9
3.4

Work for the dole
2.4
1.9
2.2

Politics and/or political issues
2.0
1.6
1.8
Drug legalisation
2.0
1.2
1.6

Union rights
1.4
1.6
1.4

Grand Prix (not to be run in public parks)
2.0
0.4
1.3

Land rights for Aborigines
1.4
0.8
1.1

Child immunisation
0.7
1.6
1.1
Animal rights
0.0
1.9
0.9

Education cuts
0.7
1.2
0.9

Unemployment
0.3
1.2
0.7

War
1.4
0.0
0.7

Others
10.5
5.8
8.6

None/do not know
Note: There were 77 missing cases for this item (12% of the cohort).

This comprehensive list of issues is interesting and valuable. Most of the issues listed could most certainly be regarded as controversial. Teachers and schools could use it to initiate their thinking about curriculum change. The range and uncertainty, demonstrated by the students, which is the reason more time needs to be given to the airing of such issues in classrooms, so students can form and express their views. These are important matters to students. Improved skills in decision-making, discussion and negotiating and a greater awareness of the troubles associated with legislation in such areas should be outcomes of such a curriculum. Students may also develop a broader sense of the term 'political', as these issues are all, ultimately decided by politicians, via legislation, (or the lack of it).

When asked in Question 13 what activities would you be prepared to engage in to support your viewpoint on this issue, Victorian students gave the following responses. Most students named only one activity, and in all cases only one response was coded per student. The categories listed below were readily developed from those responses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protest/demonstrate</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to persuade others</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petition (signing and organising)</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write letters</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1

Analysis & writing

4.7
1.3
3.1

Violent responses

2.9
1.7
2.7

Direct intervention

1.1
3.4
2.1

Explicit modelling

1.8
1.3
1.6

Class discussion

1.1
2.2
1.6

Administer surveys
0.7
2.2
1.4

Leaflets/letterbox
0.0
3.0
1.4

Joining lobby group
1.4
0.9
1.2

Raise/donate money
0.4
1.3
0.8

Voting
1.1
0.4
No activities
37.7
15.5
27.3

Do not know
14.9
18.5
16.4

Note: There were 121 missing cases for this item (19% of the cohort), and the gender proportion of the missing cases was similar to that of the total cohort.
The most significant aspect of this data is how few of the students responded in such a way as to suggest they would act, even on a matter of importance to them. Almost twenty per cent of the students did not respond at all. and of those who did respond, forty four per cent indicated they would not act, or did not know how they would act. Only slightly more than half of those who responded were able to nominate an action they were prepared to engage in, in support of their viewpoint, and more female than male students were in this number. Such is the
political activism of Victorian students.

These data demonstrate more strongly than anything else to date the degree to which Victorian students have negative and/or apathetic attitudes regarding political participation. The Political Efficacy scale offers still further evidence to support this view. The range of activities listed in Table 4 is as broad as one could expect, given their having had little personal experience of engagement in the political process, and few curriculum explorations of the issues. Despite this paucity of experience, they have a theoretical grasp of the options open to them in a democracy.

In both Tables 3 and 4 there is a substantial percentage of students who say they do not know, that they are unsure of whether there is an answer. This number can probably be added to the missing cases, and the proportion of uncertain students then approximates half of the whole cohort. This suggests a level of ignorance of and/or alienation from the political process, either of which should be a concern. It certainly indicates these students have had so little exposure to the issues and political processes external to the school that they are literally 'at sea'.

In conclusion, Victorian students surveyed have had a lower level of engagement in the political process than their international counterparts. This lower level of engagement applies to the activity which is the focus of each question asked, no matter how marginally political it is. Finally the difference in level of activity is routinely as many as one third of the cohort fewer of the Victorian students were engaged than their international counterparts. This is a
significant finding.

Students who have participated in the processes in or during the time of their schooling are more likely to participate in the broader political processes as adults, and high participation rates are likely to contribute positively to the strengthening of the democratic tradition in Australia. If one accepts this description of the inter-relationship of factors, and regards the described outcome as a desirable goal, the low levels of participation demonstrated by Victorian students are thus a concern. In the next section of this chapter, data derived from the Political Interest scale is added to what has been learned, to date, from the students' political experience.

B: Political Interest

Political interest is taken to be interest in the political process, or at the least, in the outcomes which result from the political process. To be able to link these two factors one must also understand that the process includes a range of political participants (one of whom is oneself) and that the political process can deliver outcomes which may be solutions to problems which bother the individual or society. The important point about political interest is that if enough people in a society do not have a political interest, then democracy will atrophy. It may not result in the fall of governments, or the creation of anarchy, but the good health of democracy requires that a goodly proportion of the adult population see themselves as being involved in the government. At base the population must be interested. Even if it
is no more than self-interest.

The next step in the process of developing a profile of Victorian Year 11 students political interests is to seek their responses to the items in the Political Interest scale. The political interest so demonstrated, when linked to their other political attitudes, will enable us to have a handle on their understandings of the political processes, as well as their opinions of them.

The Hahn Political Interest scale used items developed by Ehman and Gillespie (1975). It also contained items developed at the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center which had been used extensively since the 1960s. The political efficacy items all loaded on the one factor in the factor analysis. Cronbach alphas for both cohorts were satisfactory, at .88 (Hahn) and .90 (ACER), indicating its strong internal consistency.

There were eight political interest items in Part 1 of the survey instrument. The table which follows contains the Victorian data for the political interest scale of attitudes. The gist of the item's meaning is provided, the sequence of the items has been changed, and the missing data (less than 1 per cent of the cohort on this attitude scale) have been omitted from the table.

Table 5: Percentage Distribution of Victorian Responses to 'Political Interest' Items
Low Rating

Medium Rating

High Rating

I would enjoy having lessons where politics and government are discussed.

I am usually interested in political matters.

I would be interested to find out how political parties work.

I think hearing or watching news about politics is interesting.

I enjoy political campaigns.
I think I would enjoy participating in political groups.

I would enjoy being on a committee nominating candidates for political office.

I think it would be interesting to run for political office such as the local council or Parliament.

Note: The Low rating corresponds to 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree', the Medium rating corresponds to 'Uncertain', and the High rating
corresponds to 'Agree' and Strongly Agree'.

The 633 Year 11 Victorian students in 1997 Australia showed a level of Political Interest at the lower end of the scale, compared to their overseas counterparts in democratic countries in 1993/4, as identified in the Hahn Study. The following Table displays the means of the Victorian response ratings on all the eight Political Interest items. This Table shows that Victorian students had the lowest mean rating of all the countries, bar the Netherlands’ cohort, and that these two countries' means were considerably lower than those of their four counterparts. The means and standard deviations have been calculated on the five step response rating scale and it can be seen that students in four of the countries rank their political interest at the disagree/uncertain part of the scale. There was a consistent if small gender difference, with males generally showing a greater interest than the females.

Table 6: Means and Standard Deviations on 'Political Interest' Scale of Students from Six Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Victoria
2.49
0.87

England
2.94
0.86

Germany
2.96
0.79

USA
3.10
0.79

Denmark
3.29
0.74

Note: The means of responses are presented in ascending order. (Higher means represent a higher degree of agreement.)
The items for this Political Interest scale fall into two groups, both on the basis of the content focus of the items and on the basis of the student response rates.
The first group of items contains those which deal with the idea of interests as an intellectual entity, as something about which they may think and learn, a passive approach, rather than something they might act on or do. About a third of the Victorian students respond with agreement to these first four propositions. This compares with half of them who respond negatively. This pattern was not evident in the international cohort.

The second group of items on this scale contains the ones which deal with the students contemplating what they may do which illustrates their political interest. The gender difference on the first three of this subset of items was consistently one of the females being less interested, by a few percentage points. The Victorian students' responses are neither positive nor enthusiastic. When asked about actual activities which suggest involvement, fewer than one in five express interest. Their High ratings average only 18 per cent, ranging from 15 to 22 per cent. Their large Low rating responses resonate with hostility to the activities. This pattern is not matched by the overseas students.

It is significant that the Medium rating on most of the items on this Political Interest scale is smaller for the Victorian students than it is for the other students, and also smaller than it is for the Victorian students on most of the other scales. This indicates that the students are not uncertain about their own level of interest, but are able to readily identify it. We are not dealing here with a
student cohort which is confused about what they think. They just think that politics is not interesting and less than one third want to have anything much to do with that world. Interviewing of individuals in this cohort would be necessary to precisely establish the reasons students have for their view, though their responses to items on other scales in this study are good indicators as to their reasons.

One explanation of the very negative attitudes of Victorian students to political interest, relative to the international students, is that they are operating under a limited view or interpretation of the word 'political'. Experience with students at this level, taken together with the differential responses to particular items, could well suggest that by political they mean 'party political'. Students who see some of their daily habits or activities as political may well find political matters to be of immediate and profound interest to them.

Hahn's view of the Netherlands' students is that there were many reasons for their lack of interest ... and since the Victorian's level of interest is, similarly low, her explanation is worth consideration. She refers to Dekker's work on Dutch teacher's reasons for not wanting to devote classroom time to the study of politics and government. The primary reasons for their reluctance to teach about politics were because they did not have a background in political science, students were not interested in the topic, parents and administrators were not supportive, and they feared being accused of indoctrination' (Hahn, in press:81).

All these factors seem to be applicable to the Victorian situation.

C: Attitudes to Future Political Activity
The final stage in gaining an understanding of the political interest of students is provided in the responses to this scale. With this set of items students are asked to project themselves into the future, and on the basis of their current interest and political attitudes, to respond to a range of activities, as to the likelihood of them being involved in those ways in the future. These activities are generally more overtly political than those in the Political Experience and the Political Interest scales, so that the distinction students appeared to draw in those scales, between those activities which are passively and actively political, is less likely to be evident.

In Part 2 of the questionnaire the students were asked to rate the likelihood of them engaging in a range of political activities. The items on the Political Activity index were used in a study by Merelman (1971).

Table 7: Percentage Distribution of Victorian Responses to 'Future Political Activity' Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How likely do you think it is that you will:</th>
<th>Low Rating</th>
<th>High Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>run for public office?</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vote in national election?</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
vote in local elections?
14

work for a political candidate or party?
89
11

join a political organisation?
88
12

join a pressure, protest, or interest group?
61
39

let your parliamentary representatives know what you think about a public issue?
44
56
Note: The Low rating corresponds to 'Definitely Not' and 'Not Very Likely', and the High rating corresponds to 'Somewhat Likely' and Very 'Likely'.

The following Table displays the means of the Victorian response ratings on the seven items on the Future Political Activity index. It demonstrates that the Victorian students were the least likely of the six country cohorts to think they would engage in future political activities. Unlike on some of the other scales in this data set, the standard deviation of all cohorts is very similar, and is relatively low. These students were confident about their attitudes on this index. With the exception of one item on the scale the gender difference in student response on this scale is no greater than four percent, with females being consistently less interested.

Table 8: Means and Standard Deviations on 'Future Political Activity' Index of Students from Six Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
England
2.55
0.48

USA
2.75
0.50

Denmark
2.87
0.47

Germany
2.96
0.50

Note: The means of responses are presented in ascending order. (Higher means represent a higher degree of agreement.)

When asked to rate the likelihood that they would run for public office, only 7 per cent of Victorian students thought it likely. This is the most active of political activities, so the low likelihood is to
be expected. It is however considerably lower than the international students whose response as to likelihood was in the range of 10 to 21 per cent. It is a significant finding because the low interest for the career of politics suggests also the resultant reduction of the pool of potential candidates for future political office. Such are the processes by which our democratic futures are diminished.

In the light of voting being compulsory in Australia, it is surprising that, when asked about the likelihood of voting in national elections and voting in local elections, the negative response, the students' Low rating, was 20 and 14 per cent respectively. Either these students did not know voting is compulsory, or they intended to defy the law. Regardless of the explanation, their lack of political interest is manifest. When one compares the responses of the international cohort, where voting is optional, the largest Low ratings are from the Netherlands (29% and 31%), but the other four range from 2 to 12 and 7 to 15 per cent respectively. If the future of democracy is in the hands of politically interested young people, it is demonstrably safer in England, America and Denmark than it is in the Netherlands and in Victoria, Australia.

No other cohort is so negative about possible engagement through the party political process. Only slightly more than one in ten students regard it as likely they will engage in such an activity. This Victorian students' abhorrence of party politics was further demonstrated in the discussions with students. Joining, in the future, a non-party group, one which has political intent but 'non-political' goals, is somewhat easier for students to
rate as likely. In response to the question as to the likelihood of them joining a pressure, protest or interest group, (organisations such as Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Animal Rights or Right to Life), the Victorian High rating trebled to 39%. The international data ranges from 51 to 68 per cent, so the Victorian students register themselves as considerably less likely than the international students to join such a group.

This is the item which revealed a huge gender differential response. The High rating response average for the whole Victorian cohort was 39 per cent. The female High rating response was 50 per cent, whilst the male's High rating response was 28 per cent. How to explain this gender difference of 22 per cent, especially in the context of the maximum equivalent variance on any other item on this scale being no more than 4 per cent? The greater preparedness of female students than male students to join a group with the intention of righting some wrong, of having some political impact is strikingly clear. Their High rating response was just below that of two other cohorts: England (51%) and Germany (52%). The other three cohorts registered High ratings from 66-68 per cent.

The low level of political interest of Victorian students is compounded by their relative lack of political experience, and further demonstrated by their anticipated future political activity. A better understanding of the reasons for Victorian students' low level of political interest is going to be necessary before its causes can be effectively addressed. Exploring the differences between the joining intentions of the male and females students might be a good place to
start investigations at a school and classroom level. Student discussion of the gender differences, if replicated, can be held. Discussion can be broadened to a consideration of the ways in which the political process impacts on the other political matters of interest to them. Possibly they would then be in a position to revise their concept of what constitutes the political, and the degree to which this is part of their lack of interest may become clearer. Certainly strategies for enhancing the very low political interest demonstrated by these students will need to be developed, if acceptance of the new civics curriculum in schools and greater participation in the political process by young people are the goals.

One study which interviewed young Australians on their views as to desirable outcomes for Australian society was the 1995 Youth Partnership Study. In the report: Having Our Say About the Future: Young People's Expectations and Dreams for Australia ..., Richard Eckersley, in his commentary upon the study's findings, in Appendix B, wrote

The study suggests that many young Australians feel they owe little allegiance to society. They may continue to work within the 'system', but they no longer believe in it, or are willing to serve it.

(Eckersley: 1996)

Certainly the student attitudes to involvement in the political system, as revealed by this ACER study, support such an interpretation. This 'worst-case scenario' cannot afford to be discounted as the most likely
explanation of why students in this sample reveal such negative attitudes to political involvement, and such low levels of political interest. Perhaps they have consciously distanced themselves from their society. If this is so, it will be no easy task to get them back.

Political Trust

The attitude of Political Trust incorporates the confidence which people, in this case students, have in relation to those in power. Democratic practice is predicated on the premise that those who are elected can be trusted to represent the beliefs, views and values of those who have elected them (and, many would argue, those who did not elect them). Politicians and political parties develop policies which embody these views, and the reasonable expectation is that those who derive power from constituencies will fulfil the policies on which they were voted into power. If the electorate, or future voters such as these students, do not perceive there to be a congruence between what the representatives say they will do and what they perceive them as doing, they do not feel trust for their people in government, and the foundations of the democratic process are undermined.

Closely connected to the centrality of political trust in the democratic process is the attitude of political efficacy: the means by which you, the holder of the attitude, believe you can effectively participate in, and possibly influence the process. The study included a political efficacy scale.

The students were asked to consider, and rate on a five point scale,
the trust they felt for the people in government. In the discussions which were conducted in the school groups, students demonstrated the degrees of trust they felt towards the school administration and their teachers, and in these cases they were able to provide some evidence of why they felt the way they did. There was no such opportunity to further explore the reasons students had for their political trust attitudes, but their responses are illuminative of their reasons for holding the attitudes, as well as of the attitudes themselves.

The Hahn Political Trust scale contained items developed at the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center and used in many political socialisation studies in the past. The political trust items load over two factors in the factor analysis. The distinction which this factor analysis identifies is between items dealing with the characteristics of politicians per se, and their perceived preparedness to consider the views of the electorate in forming policy or managing the governing of the country. The scale is thus still a coherent one, and the Cronbach alphas were satisfactory, at .78 (Hahn) and .74 (ACER).

There were seven political trust items in Part 1 of the survey instrument. The table which follows contains the Victorian data for the political trust scale of attitudes. The gist of the item's meaning is provided, the sequence of the items has been changed, and the missing data (approximately 1 per cent of the cohort on this attitude scale) have been omitted from the table.

Table 9: Percentage Distribution of Victorian Responses to 'Political Trust' Items
Low Rating

Medium Rating

High Rating

Most people in government are honest.

68
26
6

People in the government care a lot about what people like us think

66
25
9

People in the government waste a lot of taxpayers' money

70
22
8
People who are in government can be trusted to do what is right for the country.

I think that the people in government care about what people like me and my family think.

People in government, running the whole country, care about the opinions of ordinary people.

People running the government are smart and usually know what they're doing.
Note: The Low rating corresponds to 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree',
the Medium rating corresponds to 'Uncertain', and the High rating
corresponds to 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree'.

The 633 Year 11 Victorian students in 1997 Australia showed a level of
Political Trust at the lower end of the scale, compared to their
overseas counterparts in democratic countries in 1993/4, as identified
in the Hahn Study. Table 10 displays the means of the Victorian
response ratings on all the seven Political Trust items. It shows that

Table 10: Means and Standard Deviations on 'Political Trust' Scale of
Students from Six Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
0.62

USA
2.42
0.63

England
2.52
0.65

Netherlands
2.84
0.68

Denmark
2.87
0.66

Note: The means of responses are presented in ascending order. (Higher means represent a higher degree of agreement.)

Victorian students had the lowest mean rating of all the countries, bar the German cohort. The means and standard deviations have been calculated on the five step response rating scale and it can be seen that not in any of the countries do the politicians and government rate
well, in the view of the students.

The Victorian students do not demonstrate positive political attitudes in relation to the performance of their politicians and government officials, with an average Low rating of 62 per cent over the whole of the scale. Two thirds of students in Victorian schools did not think their politicians could be trusted. This compares to an international picture which, in Germany, at least in 1993, was quite similar.

Female students have an even less positive attitude towards people in government than their male peers. The female students' High ratings responses were smaller, by between 1 to 6 per cent, on every item on this scale. In addition, they rated their disagreement with all the propositions as greater than the male students, by between 1 and 13 per cent. The females, in a cohort which was not positively disposed towards political trust accentuate the negative trend. The reverse description has the male students as more positive in their political trust than the females. This striking gender difference becomes still more significant when seen in the context of Hahn reporting a gender difference in only one of the five countries in her cohort. In the Netherlands, Dutch males 'reported higher levels of political trust than did females'.

Initial judgement regarding the uncertain, Medium rating may have been that the Victorian average of approximately 27 per cent of responses, over the seven items in the political trust scale, was rather high. But it compares favourably with the international data, and in that context takes on a different dimension. One interpretation of this aspect of the data can be that Victorian students are clearer in their
own minds as to their political attitudes than their international counterparts. Some would say that this is a good thing. Another interpretation, however, is that this Victorian sense of relative certainty is due to an inexperienced, even simplistic view of politicians and the workings of government.

The One Nation Party contribution to the political discussions Victorian students may have been witnessing, and themselves conducting, at the time of the survey is worthy of mention as a possible factor in their views of the trustworthiness of politicians. The response behaviour of political parties and politicians to this phenomenon of One Nation had been a key feature of the public discussion. This phenomenon, recent at the time of the survey administration, was regularly mentioned in student discussions.

The Clemenger Report, The Silent Majority III, recorded that 67 per cent of Australians were 'very concerned' about politicians never keeping their word. It was ranked as the seventh most important concern of the respondents (where the top-ranked concern registered 70%). Sixty one per cent were 'very concerned' about politicians being more interested in re-election than in running the country, and also about politicians getting big super payouts after only a short time in office. These data suggest a climate of broad-based distrust of politicians by Australians, a climate which one can infer will have had some impact on student attitudes to the trustworthiness of politicians.

(White:1997)
These findings reflect a fundamental problem for those who wish to increase student (and adult) participation in decision-making in the political arena. The problem is the anomaly between the student involvement (which has been demonstrated to be little) and the means by which they can be involved in the political process (which they have demonstrated they do not trust). If the only way in which people can demonstrate their participation is one which is focussed on handing over that interest to politicians, and they do not trust (or respect) the politicians, the likelihood of them becoming involved is very small. Thus their lack of interest remains low, because they remain ignorant of the process and its potentially positive outcomes. There are a number of ways in which this log-jam of interests and ignorance can be released, but they all require an intensity of feeling which only a very surprising event could engender. Students would need to be startled out of their lack of interest. Since they appear to have such a jaundiced view of the political process and its chief participants, the surprise would need to be a positive one. Any negative outcomes they would simply regard as endorsing their negativity. School are admirably placed to provide positive experiences. Given the students’ negative views about student involvement in decision-making in schools, any initiative by schools could become the surprise. Students’ sense of being a member of the school community, and their sense of responsibility to it, could be the focus of such initiatives. The study demonstrated low levels of Victorian student interest and participation in the political process, and the little faith they have
in the prime participants. The next step to be made in understanding student political attitudes is to investigate their view of the efficacy of the political process.

Political Efficacy

Political efficacy is the attitude that it is possible for individuals and groups to participate in, and possibly influence, the course of government action and policy. Unless one holds this attitude, there is no incentive to attempt to engage in the political process. Persons who believe there are mechanisms which allow them and others to affect the government are more likely to participate in ways which they believe have the potential to have an effect on government. Those who have a low level of conviction that effective mechanisms for them to make the government listen to them, either as individuals or as part of a larger group, are less likely to attempt to engage, and cynicism in the political process can result. Governments which recognise or value the importance of having an engaged constituency are more likely to have transparent processes which allow the public to observe, comment on and feel some ownership of, both the processes and outcomes of government. Such governments are more likely to encourage a view of themselves as open in structure, as listening to the constituency, and encouraging of participation.

The issue of who has the efficacy, and how it can be implemented, is
commonly confused with whether efficacy exists at all, for anyone outside the government or bureaucracy. The expectations which a population has of its government, how it is judged in terms of process and outcomes, can be positively or negatively affected by government, through the communications it offers the population regarding these matters. If the people judge the government to be mouthing rhetoric, not delivering what was promised or expected, they can either become engaged in a critique (assuming they know how to, and consider it a potentially worthwhile exercise), or they wait for the next election.

When cynicism becomes endemic in a democratic society, the people lose their sense of the efficacy of even voting, with low voter turnouts at elections, and a further reduction in the sense of political efficacy results.

For attitudes of political efficacy to be raised to or sustained at a high level requires a number of factors be maintained. People's expectations have to be possible, they have to understand that for their needs to be met someone else's needs may not be, and they have to know how to effectively engage in the political process in such a way as to maximise the impact, or efficacy, of their views. Thus it is possible for open, democratic governments which genuinely wish their constituencies to have a high sense of political efficacy, to be greeted by cynicism.

Once cynicism of governments is a commonly held view in a society, it is difficult to turn the attitude around, since the reason for it may be well outside the ambit of the government to address. Education in political effectiveness is one response, and it is frequently directed
at students, rather than adult populations. Knowing the political
efficacy attitudes of an existing senior student population can tell a
great deal about what kind of political education is necessary in order
to achieve an effective participatory democracy for the next generation
of that political society.
The items in this study's questionnaire address a number of the factors
and issues mentioned in the introductory remarks on political efficacy.
Students were asked to respond to questions about the impact of voting
and other 'alternative' political activities, and the efficacy of
themselves and their family on government. Their responses established
their views on the range of ways, and degree to which, they believed
political efficacy was possible in their democracy. The items referred
to a theoretical and/or a personal sense of political efficacy.
The Hahn Political Efficacy scale contained items developed at the
University of Michigan's Survey Research Center and others developed by
Hahn. The political efficacy items load over three factors, though
predominantly on the one factor, in the factor analysis. The items
which tended to load separately were those which distinguished between
ideas about what students can do, and those which addressed ideas about
things and changes which can be achieved. Measures of political
efficacy traditionally suffer from notoriously weak validity and
reliability, and the Cronbach alphas for both cohorts were low, at .62
(Hahn) and .59 (ACER), indicating, as Hahn acknowledges, that she 'was
unable to overcome the difficulties with this scale'. The ACER Alpha
was particularly affected by one item which was the sole member of the
third factor matrix (joining pressure groups and giving money). The
ACER Alpha for the scale rose to .63, after a varimix rotation.

There were seven political efficacy items in Part 1 of the survey instrument. Table 11 contains the Victorian data for the political efficacy scale of attitudes. The gist of the item's meaning is provided, the sequence of items has been changed, and the missing data (less than 1 per cent of the cohort on this attitude scale) have been omitted from the table.

Table 11: Percentage Distribution of Victorian Responses to ‘Political Efficacy’ Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Rating</th>
<th>Medium Rating</th>
<th>High Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voting influences how things are run in this country.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signing petitions and joining a demonstrations can influence government</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
decisions. 

Only if enough people tell government officials they disagree will government policy change.

Once we are adults we can have a say in how the government runs things.

People like me and my parents can influence government decisions.

My family has a say in what government does.
Joining pressure groups and giving money can enable me and my parents to influence government decisions.

Note: The Low rating corresponds to 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree', the Medium rating corresponds to 'Uncertain', and the High rating corresponds to 'Agree' and Strongly Agree'.

The 633 Year 11 Victorian students in 1997 Australia showed a level of Political Efficacy at the lower end of the scale, compared to their overseas counterparts in democratic countries in 1993/4, as identified in the Hahn Study. The following Table displays the means of the Victorian response ratings on all the seven Political Efficacy items. As with the Political Trust scale, this Table shows that Victorian students had the lowest mean rating of all the countries, bar the German cohort. The means and standard deviations have been calculated on the five step response rating scale and it can be seen that students
in all the countries rank political efficacy at no better than the lower end of the 'agree' scale.

### Table 12: Means and Standard Deviations on 'Political Efficacy' Scale of Students from Six Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
USA
3.47
0.56

Denmark
3.44
0.50

Note: The means of responses are presented in ascending order. (Higher means represent a higher degree of agreement).

The response of Victorian students to the first item is an emphatically positive one, with a High rating of agreement with the proposition from 72 per cent of the sample. Voting is the most basic political participation, though it can also be the most perfunctory, especially in Australia, where voting is compulsory for all elections at the federal and state levels of government. An additional measure of the strength of the students' attitude can be taken from the very small percentage who responded with a Low rating. This is the smallest Low rating on any of the scales on the questionnaire, bar the Equal Rights scale. The third striking aspect of the data is the small response in the Medium rating, which at 19 per cent is lower than that of any other item on this scale. The students show confidence in the efficacy of voting.

Conversely, concern could be expressed that over one in four Victorian
students did not think that voting was efficacious. The international
data indicate that approximately one quarter of the students in
England, America and the Netherlands had a similar view. (The German
response was 62%, while for Denmark it was only 14%.) If voting is the
most basic participation in the political process, and so many do not
think it an unequivocally efficacious activity, (which is not, however,
to say they will not vote), their levels of efficacy regarding other
participation will possibly, be even lower. There are serious
ramifications here for participating democracies.
If voting is the most basic politically efficacious activity, the
second proposition, which tapped responses to the efficacy of signing
petitions and joining demonstration, signals the attitude of political
efficacy at the next remove. Sixty per cent of Victorian students
agreed that it was possible to rate this as an efficacious activity.
This compares with between 73 and 55 per
cent of the international students, with the Victorian students having
the second smallest High rating. The Medium rating of the Victorian
students is rising on this item, when compared to the voting item, but

the Low rating is still small. It seems from this that students do
believe that it is possible to affect the political process, that
mechanisms exist which can be efficacious.
The third item provides something of a caveat on the previous one. It
was a proposition to which 51 per cent of Victorian students gave a
High rating. The emphasis in this item on only, and on the need for
there to be enough people, both imply that the change being advocated could not be a radical one. This is political efficacy in its most abstract form. All the international students were more inclined to agree with the statement than the Victorians, and they were also all less inclined to be uncertain about what they thought (33% of students from England were uncertain, more than any other group). The 16 per cent of Victorian students who gave a Low rating to the proposition compared to the average Low rating of all the other groups of 5%. The attitude of efficacy, which Victorian students demonstrated in relation to how likely it is that government policy will be changed, even if enough people tell the government they disagree, was not one which shows a positive sense of political efficacy, neither in the general nor the abstract.

In the light of their response to the previous item, it is not surprising to find that their sense of personal political efficacy is not as high as their attitude to efficacy in the general or abstract. When asked to project themselves into the future and consider their role and impact vis a vis how the government runs things, only 41 per cent of the Victorian students gave a High rating. The international students High rating responses ranged from 36 to 60 per cent, averaging a considerably larger High rating than the Victorian cohort. The Medium rating was selected by nearly one third of the Victorian students, similar to the international responses. The Medium rating for Victorian females was a very considerable 10 per cent larger than that for males. These large uncertainty rates are consistent with the previously demonstrated lack of conviction about political efficacy in
the abstract. This rating is presumably also affected by the
uncertainty which students, not unreasonably, feel about what might be
the situation once they become adults. The Low rating from 27 per cent
of Victorian students (the female rating was 13 per cent smaller than
the males response, at 20%) is similar to that from the international
cohort.

The two items which deal with students' attitudes to the political
effectiveness of their family (which includes them) received a rather
different set of responses. With these two items, the next shift of
focus away from the abstract and into the personal lives of the
students has been taken. For these items they need to consider the
efficacy of them and their families. The Victorian Low ratings were
both large, at 47 and 32 per cent respectively. The Medium ratings
were also both large, (with the female rate being 9 per cent larger
than the male), similar to the international distribution. The
Victorian students' small High rating for the first item (19%), differs
from the considerably larger percentage for the second item (35%).

More detailed questioning of the students as to the reasons for their
different responses to the two items would be necessary to establish
whether the difference is a significant one. That fewer than one in
five Victorian students gave a High rating to the me and my parents
item indicates a lower sense of political efficacy, compared to the
international cohort, except for the German students which was similar.

The last of the seven items on the Political Efficacy scale dealt with
some aspects of efficacy already tapped in other items, and also
introduced new examples of political activity. In combining these, the
item creates a third factor in the factor analysis, of which this item is the sole member. It is impossible to be sure which factors the students are responding to when they rated the proposition, though the Victorian students’ responses were very similar to those given the me and my parents item. The response pattern is, therefore, different from the item whether people like me and my parents can influence government, in the same way as the me and my parents response pattern was different.

The international students responded to this item with a larger than usual Medium rating (from 33% to 48%), and much larger Low ratings (from 26% to 42%), when compared to the signing petitions and joining demonstrations item. In this they were similar to the Victorian students who appear to think the efficacy of signing petitions and joining demonstrations is much greater than the efficacy derived from joining pressure groups and giving money.

It is interesting to speculate how students may have responded to an item about the efficacy of joining, or voting for, minor parties. The role in government of minor parties, in Australia as well as in European countries, ranges from the casual to the pivotal, depending on the major parties in government and the issues of the time.

Considering the support given by students to voting, petitioning and demonstrating, as efficacious activities, contrasted with the lack of support given pressure groups, it would be very interesting to see where they placed the relative efficacy of joining or voting for minor
parties. Their responses to such an item might also enable a more confident unpacking of the students' responses.

The female students' High ratings responses were up to 3 per cent smaller on all bar one of the items. They were more consistently inclined to use the Medium rating than the males, and they rated their disagreement with all the propositions as less than the male students, bar one item. The reverse description has the male students as more positive and more certain about their political efficacy than the females. This gender difference becomes still more significant when seen in the context of Hahn reporting only a negligible gender difference in one of the five countries in her cohort (USA). This consistent gender difference is something to which teachers and curriculum developers need to be alert, and possibly adjust for, in their work.

It is not useful to attempt to generalise too much about the Victorian students' overall ratings to the items on the Political Efficacy scale. The Victorian students have a level of Political Efficacy which is more positive than it is negative, with an average of the agreement ratings scoring approximately 43 per cent. Some 30 per cent have uncertainties in their attitudes (especially the females), and the average of the Low ratings was approximately 27 per cent. It is for others to make a judgement about how satisfactory these are as levels of political efficacy for a group of young people who will soon be voters and adults. Some of them seem positive, others not. Critical to an analysis of the overall picture are the significant variations in the responses given to the different items, according to
the specifics of the items. Victorian students’ sense of political
efficacy is less positive than that of their international counterparts
(except for the Germans), as the means data reveal. Hahn comments on
how students in her study were 'more optimistic about their own
eventual influence than they were about their families’ current ability
to influence political decisions’, and this is a also a slight trend in
the Victorian data. Perhaps there is some cause for optimism here.

Classroom Climate

There is a tradition of research into classroom climate, which examines
the impact of classroom (and more broadly school) climate on the
attitudes which students develop towards power, politics, participation
in and negotiating about a whole raft of situations involving
decision-making. These attitudes can be derived from and directed at
the abstract and the practical, personally-experienced, and they may
manifest themselves differently in these two different kinds of
environments. The hypothesis which underpins much of the work is the
conviction that more positive student attitudes towards the concepts,
issues and activities listed above, will result from being able to
experience open, participatory classrooms and schools.

However the outcomes do not remain just personal, student-based ones,
but develop a societal impact component also. For, as the second stage
in the argument goes, such classrooms can model participatory,
negotiating behaviours, thus directly teaching students the skills and
understandings necessary to effectively participate in the political processes and mechanisms which are available to them in their society's political system. If the argument is held by a school and it wishes to achieve those outcomes for its students, it can structure classrooms in certain ways, and actively support certain values and classroom behaviours.

To provide students with experiences which can lead to such understandings and skills is to encourage students to believe that participation is a worthwhile activity, that their participation might, indeed can, make a difference. This is the third step in the discussion/argument/analysis. For knowing how to participate is not enough ... one must also believe that it is worth the effort. Students who have had positive participatory experiences at school will understand that participation in decision-making can be worth the effort.

The final step in this line of reasoning is that in such a climate, with such teaching and learning, more students having positive political attitudes will result, thus leading to a higher degree of informed political participation in the society, and thus democracy will be strengthened. As Hahn states in the chapter on classroom climate:

Educators have often argued that for young people to become active, involved citizens in a democracy, they ought to experience democratic dialogue and open inquiry in their social studies classes. (in press, ch 5)

It is important to remind oneself, especially if in a school, on the
receiving end of an ever-increasing list of social and political
imperatives, that the school is the not the only place where students
can learn such attitudes and skills. Students draw on many other
sources in their political attitudes formation. Nevertheless, the need
for students to explore the relative different or unknown is one the
school can meet better than the family. Some of the items in this
scale deal specifically with this aspect of classroom climate.
Analysis of the experience of equity, or its lack, is sometimes easier
in a group, especially a diverse group, than it is the case in a family
or in front of a well-made television documentary.
But, the crux of the students’ potential learning is that the
opportunity and tools for the participatory pedagogy have to be at the
ready. The classroom climate has to be right. Teachers have to be
ready and willing to engage in participatory processes. They have to
be trained and encouraged to do so. Rhetoric abounds from ministers,
school systems, administrators and teachers, mouthing their belief in
such democratic citizenship outcomes being the desired student and
school goals.
Some reality testing as to the readiness of teachers to model these
participatory approaches is required. The only possible test is to ask
students how they have experienced classroom climates in their
schooling. Before we can ask (or attempt to assert or prove) whether
Victorian classrooms are providing students with experiences which
support their confident democratic involvement as citizens, we must ask
students for their attitudes on the levels of participation and the
respect they and their opinions are accorded in the classrooms (and
This study is a contribution to obtaining base-line data on the extent to which participatory approaches are currently part of school experience. Analysis of the student responses to the classroom climate items can indicate explanations of student responses to subsequent political attitude scales.

Before a complex superstructure can be built, the foundations must be laid. If attitudes of political trust and efficacy are demonstrated by Victorian students, and if these correlate with positive attitudes regarding the kinds of classroom climates they have experienced, then we have the beginnings of an Australian civics and citizenship research. The first step, supplied by this study, is to select a range of school types, with a range of student types, and to ask the foundational, political attitudinal questions, starting with the classroom climate scale.

The Hahn Classroom Climate scale contained four items developed by Walberg and Anderson and used in the 1975 IEA Civics Study on the 'independence of opinion encouraged in the classroom' scale (Torney, Oppenheim, & Farnen, 1975). One was written by Hahn for the earlier study she conducted in the five countries, and in the follow-up study conducted in 1993/4 she added three more which had been developed by Ehman, Hahn and Harwood, and used in the interim period. The classroom climate items in this study's questionnaire all loaded on one factor in the factor analysis, indicating a coherent scale, and the Cronbach alphas were satisfactory, at .80 (Hahn) and .82 (ACER), indicating
strong internal consistency.

There were nine classroom climate items in Part 1 of the survey instrument. Table 12 contains the Victorian data for the classroom climate scale of attitudes. The gist of the item's meaning is provided, the sequence of items has been changed, and the missing data (less than 1 per cent of the cohort on this attitude scale) have been omitted from the table, and percentages of valid data have been quoted.

Table 12: Percentage Distribution of Victorian Responses to 'Classroom Climate' Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Rating</th>
<th>Medium Rating</th>
<th>High Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In our classes students are encouraged to make up their own minds about issues.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In our classes the teachers try to get students to speak freely and openly</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I feel free to express my opinions in classes even when I disagree with most of the other students.

In our classes students feel free to express their opinions even when they are different from the teachers.

Our teachers respect our opinions and encourage us to express them.

In our classes teachers usually present more than one side to an issue when explaining them in class.

In class discussions we are encouraged to consider many points of view on issues.
Our teachers are interested in students' ideas about politics and government and like to hear what we have to say.

In our classes we often discuss controversial political, economic and social issues.

Note: The Low rating corresponds to 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree', the Medium rating corresponds to 'Uncertain', and the High rating corresponds to 'Agree' and Strongly Agree'.

The 633 Year 11 Victorian students showed a level of at the lower end of the scale, compared to their overseas counterparts in democratic countries in 1993/4, as identified in the Hahn Study. The following table displays the means of the Victorian response ratings on the
Classroom Climate scale. It shows that Victorian sample had the lowest mean rating of all the countries, bar that of the Netherlands' cohort.

The means and standard deviations have been calculated on the five step response scale.

Table 13: Means and Standard Deviations on 'Classroom Climate' Scale of Students from Six Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
USA
3.74
0.65

Denmark
3.87
0.57

Note: The means of responses are presented in ascending order. (Higher means represent a higher degree of agreement).

The Victorian students are reasonably positive about the classroom climate they experience in their schools. On all bar two of the propositions, between two thirds and three quarter of the students agree they have a democratic climate. With the exception of the item which refers to teachers' interest in politics and their interest in students' views, which fewer than half of them agree they have experienced, Victorian students' attitudes are only slightly less positive than those of their international counterparts.

The female students' High ratings responses were larger on every item on this scale, varying from between 4 to 12 per cent larger. Females were consistently less inclined to use the Medium rating than the male students. They rated their disagreement with all the propositions as
less than the male students, by between 1 and 10 per cent. The reverse
description has the male students as less positive and less certain
about their classroom climate than the females. This striking gender
difference becomes still more significant when seen in the context of
Hahn reporting a gender difference in only one of the four countries
in her cohort. In the Netherlands, 'Dutch males perceived the
classroom to be less open', than the females (Hahn, in press: Ch 5).
This consistently greater agreement by the female students with the
propositions is significant, and needs greater examination. It would
be interesting to see how differently male and female students
responded in single sexed classrooms, for in this study all the
classrooms are co-educational. Work could also be conducted on how
changes to pedagogy impact on student perception of classroom climate.
It should be kept in mind that these female perceptions may result from
different expectations of student participation levels and teacher
direction, rather than different experiences of classroom climate. It
would be a mistake to assume that these students experience
differential treatment within their classrooms. The general nature of
student response, that is the necessity for the students to use their
aggregate experience, means that individual differences between
teachers (and therefore their pedagogies) within classrooms could not
be accessed in this study.
The final two items elicited from the students responses which are very different from those afforded the previous items.

From diversity of views, the focus in the next, the eighth, item, moves to students’ political views, and whether teachers are interested in them. The item was:

Our teachers are interested in students’ ideas about politics and government and like to hear what we have to say.

In this item there is a dramatic reduction in the High rating given by Victorian students on classroom climate, compared to previous item responses. It is noteworthy that in the preliminary, worksheet stage of the questionnaire administration, the question was commonly asked by students whether they should restrict themselves to considering the social studies type of classes they might be currently experiencing.

The researcher, knowing that many of the students were not currently experiencing such classes, except via English classes perhaps, always encouraged students to take the broadest possible classroom and teacher perspective. No other clarification was ever sought by students, and the small missing data suggests, at 1.7 per cent, that students had no trouble deciding what they thought.

Forty seven per cent of Victorian students gave the proposition a High rating. The female response for this rating was a larger 54 per cent, whilst the male response was 41 per cent. The Medium rating was large, much larger than on any other item in the scale, and this is where the students’ uncertainty as to teacher interest is demonstrated. It may mean they thought that some teachers were interested and some were not,
and this interpretation of the data is supported by the discussions held with the students. The difference between male and female responses was only 4 per cent on this rating. The Low rating, at 21 per cent, is the same as for some items previously discussed, and 16 per cent the females responded on this rating, as opposed to 25 per cent of the males.

Compared with the international data, the Victorian data are not positive. The Netherlands' students were slightly less optimistic in their attitudes than the Victorians, with a High rating of 41 per cent. The English and German High rating responses, of 52 and 55 respectively, are somewhat better. But the American and Danish response rates were much larger, with 63 and 77 per cent High ratings respectively. (This between-country relative response pattern appears again in the responses to the following item.) The Medium rating was large in most of these cohorts, as in the Victorian. This indicates an unusually large undecidedness or a qualifying of the response. This tempering of their response suggests that an 'it depends on the circumstance or person' approach was being taken by the students. In this case it suggests students believe that it depends on the teachers. Some are and some are not interested.

The student response to this item on teacher interest in students' ideas on politics and government indicates that students' feelings of lack of teacher interest will need to be addressed if change is to be effected in the way classroom climates are managed. It is not simply a
matter of changing student attitudes, but also teacher attitudes, on
developing more democratic classroom climates, as well as on the
appropriateness of teachers being interested in their students'
political ideas and attitudes.
The last item on the scale was:
In our classes we often discuss controversial political, economic and social issues.
In the worksheet stage of the questionnaire administration, the appearance of the word 'controversial' in one of the examples often triggered a question as to its meaning. Generally the question was answered by other students in the classroom, usually by the provision of an example, and a definition of the term, but this scenario does suggest that the word, and perhaps the notion, was a foreign one to some of the Victorian students.
The Victorian students' High rating (39%) was the smallest of all the six countries in the two studies. The smallest percentage of the other five countries was that given by the English students, which, at 42 per cent, was much smaller than the two largest rating, from the Danish (66%) and American students (67%). The Medium rating given by the Victorian students (19%) was slightly above the average of the Medium rating responses for all the six countries. But the Low rating given by Victorian students was, at 43 per cent, the largest of all six countries, though it was only slightly above the average of the responses given by three of them: England, Germany and the Netherlands. It seems that only in Denmark and America is there a tradition of students and teachers dealing with controversial issues in classrooms.
There certainly is no evidence in this study of the activity being widely practised in Victorian classrooms.

Hahn has long had an interest in and has published in the area of 'controversial issues'. (Hahn:1991) In her report The Political Attitudes of Students in Five Countries she argues that the demonstrated lack of controversial issues being experienced by students is an important opportunity lost. She cites the research history and what evidence has been previously collected at to the effect of students experiencing a controversial issues pedagogy. She concludes ... it is important to realise that without such an emphasis instruction (on government) has proven to be inadequate. Without attention to problematic issues, the effects of social studies instruction are limited to knowledge acquisition influence on student attitudes and behaviour is negligible. (ch5)

This relationship is one she wishes to explore via her study. She reports that correlations between classroom climate and the other political attitudes demonstrated by students in her study are such that there is a positive relationship.

It thus appears that when students report that they frequently discuss controversial issues in their classes, perceive that several sides to issues are presented and discussed, and feel comfortable expressing their views, they are more likely to develop attitudes which have the potential to foster later civic participation than are students without such experiences. (ch 5)

Hahn acknowledges that 'an open classroom climate alone is not sufficient to develop positive political attitudes', if one accepts her
argument, it is essential students discuss controversial issues in class. It appears that Victorian students rarely do so. To the degree that Victorian students do not experience this controversial issues approach, as demonstrated by their responses to this item, they are being less prepared than they might be, for participation in the democratic process. Victorian students can be seen as deprived of a significant, developmental experience.

Discussion

This study consisted of administering the questionnaire, supplemented by some discussion. Little evidence is available from either of these sources which satisfactorily explains why the students have the attitudes they do regarding politicians (or the people in government), the political processes which were integral to the system of government by which they were governed, and to the role they thought they could and did have in those political, and other, processes. That they have lower levels of concern about political matters may be as a result of ignorance of the political process, or it may be from other causes. It behoves us to remember that these students had not experienced a curriculum which explicitly dealt with how their governments, or political processes in general, might work. Most of the discussions they refer to having had in their classes were about issues, rather than the complex practice of how these issues were
translated into policies, and then into legislation.

Their experience of democratic political practice external to the classroom was recorded as being very small. In addition, their school experiences of democratic procedures did not assist them greatly in the learning and practice of decision making skills. Their attitudes to the democratic nature of the climate which operated in their classrooms was one of equivocation, neither negative nor positive. One concludes from this that the nature of the climate in those classrooms is satisfactory for a pedagogy which requires listening, (not always an oppressive activity, if the teacher is respected). But it is not so suitable for a pedagogy which requires active democratic participation and decision making by individuals.

The demonstrably low level of student political interest is going to provide a real challenge to curriculum developers and teachers, if the proposed introduction of civics and citizenship education programs in Australia is to be successful. The cynicism about politicians and the apparent lack of perceived relevance of politics to the students' lives, as indicated by the findings of this study, will need to be confronted and overcome if the proposed civics education initiatives are to succeed. A better understanding of the reasons for Victorian students' low level of political interest is going to be necessary before its causes can be effectively addressed. Only then can appropriate teacher training strategies and pedagogic approaches, be devised. Without this sequence of action, in the face of this low level of student political interest, one can safely predict program failure. The failure of this curriculum area to produce favourable
learning outcomes has been previously experienced, in Australia and elsewhere.

Part 2 of the questionnaire provides us with some hints as to the sources of the students' political information, on which they have possibly built their attitudes. For they do not develop attitudes in a social or learning vacuum. Political attitudes are built upon general values and attitudes, as well as political knowledge. Other studies have researched and documented Australian adults' political attitudes. These adult attitudes appear not to be particularly affirmative of the political processes which those adults have encountered. It is inevitable that young people imbue some of these attitudes from their family and peers, from the media and their general social climate.

More work needs to be done on the transference which occurs from the socio-political climate young people inhabit, to the political attitudes they develop.

Thus, whilst it is easy to say that the knowledge base for the Victorian students' political attitudes is weak, lacking specific knowledge does not preclude them from having attitudes. They are just more likely to be uninformed attitudes. Nor would it be wise to conclude that additional knowledge, of the type proposed being delivered by the Discovering Democracy program, will necessarily positively affect the political attitudes of students. Further research is necessary to establish why students have the attitudes they do. Additional research is also necessary to identify the kinds of
curriculum and experiences which result in more positive political attitudes. This is not yet well understood or documented. The goal of this study was to establish what political attitudes this cohort of Victorian students had, in first term of the 1997 school year.

Policy Ramifications of these Findings
There are a number of ways in which this report and its findings might inform and have a productive impact on policy. Considered in the context of the history and development of the civics curriculum debate in Australia, as outlined in Chapter 1, there are some conclusions which can be drawn from this study's data and analysis which are relevant to three policy areas. These policy areas are curriculum development, at a system and local level, teacher training and professional development of existing teachers. Each includes an emphasis on the nature of an appropriate pedagogy.

The goals of civics and citizenship education are not uniformly understood or agreed upon in Australia, but are variable and contested. Any mandated curriculum is unlikely to produce the same outcomes in different classrooms and schools, for the reasons previously discussed in this report. To assume there is agreement about the desired outcomes from civics education, as has been the case in Australia in the recent debate about the need for such a program, is unwise, because such a consensus has not been achieved. Additionally, consensus may be neither desirable nor necessary to the program's success. Indeed, this study suggests that national or systemic consensus, with the inevitable prescription that would entail, could be counter-productive.

Practitioners and systems cannot be expected to successfully deliver a
This study provides some evidence as to why the kind of program being
envisaged and the way in which it is proposed it be delivered appear to be misguided.

As has been argued elsewhere, (Mellor:1996) such a materials-based program will not facilitate an appropriate pedagogy because it disenfranchises the very practitioners whose contribution to the conceptualisation is essential to the program's success. A materials-based curriculum initiative diminishes the power of pedagogy as an curriculum issue. Yet the role of pedagogy for the teaching and learning of participatory democratic processes is central to and inherent in citizenship education. Ownership by participants of the citizenship goals to be pursued in a civics curriculum, thus ensuring goal-appropriateness to the learning community, is essential to the integrity of that community. The findings on the classroom climate scale reported in this study offer insights relevant to the importance of pedagogy and ownership in this curriculum. Furthermore, the program in its development to date, has adopted such a reductionist approach to the view of what constitutes a civics curriculum that it has narrowed rather than enlarging the horizons of possible content. Past experience and theoretic considerations have not been acknowledged. On both pedagogic and conceptual counts, the debate has been pre-empted. Another difficulty associated with facilitating a discussion of a civics curriculum is that informed debate is practically impossible. This study demonstrates low levels of student interest in and understanding of political processes. Mention has been made of the low
levels of knowledge of, and participation in, the political processes in Australia by adults. (ANOP poll in Whereas the People...) As part of a circular route, these low levels of knowledge and participation act as both a cause, and are a result, of the low priority that has been placed on ensuring teacher preparedness to teach children about the area. In the same way as Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE) has been somewhat marginalised in the school curriculum during the 1990s (Ainley: 1994), so has the demand for SOSE teachers been reduced. The numbers of teacher trainees studying civics issues, within this reduced SOSE intake in teacher training institutions, has been, and is, miniscule. The incentives for teachers to become engaged in civics education have been non-existent. This situation means substantial teacher preparation, combined with the re-orientation of the SOSE curriculum in schools, is required before civics education, of any description, can be effectively implemented in schools.

Furthermore, teachers skilled in, and comfortable with, a debate of the pedagogic issues involved in teaching civics and citizenship education are rare breed. Practitioners who are currently skilled in both the appropriate knowledge and pedagogy are almost unknown, although individuals with these expertises do exist. The experience of Junior School Council Networks and the Youth Research Centre suggests these teachers are more likely to exist in primary schools rather than secondary schools, where such an ethos is more difficult to sustain. (Latrobe JSC Network:1996, Holdsworth)

It is desirable that wide-ranging discussions of the problematics associated with a participatory, citizenship curriculum be undertaken.
The practitioners with appropriate expertise in the curriculum and/or the pedagogy of participation and politics need to lead the debate. (Prior:1992) Only by opening up the discussion in this way, can change to the experiences and attitudes of young people be effected. The problematic nature of participation demands that it be debated. This will always be so. The adverse results of students not experiencing active participation are indicated in this study by the students' ignorance of, and negative attitudes to, political and other decision-making processes.

The problematics of participatory, citizenship curricula are related to the problematics of citizenship, which Australian society and its media do not routinely address. Until our society is more knowledgeable of, and comfortable with these problematics, it is not surprising that our students and their teachers are reluctant to work with them. Benchmarking citizenship indicators within the political process is one way of having society address the concepts and problematics of citizenship. (Salvaris:1995) Integrating the benchmarking of citizenship indicators in the political process may also enable some measure of 'progress' towards citizenship goals to be made by the community. Identification and recognition of such 'progress' could positively affect the political attitudes of the community, especially in the areas of interest, trust, and efficacy.

Hahn, in the conclusion to her Report writes,

Preparation for civic life is civic life in which the political and
associational life of the community and of individuals are joined. In diverse democracies we see that dimensions of such an education occurs. So far, however, democratic education, in its complete form, has not been fully realized. There is much yet to be done. (in press:ch.6)

The Victorian study, based on and complementing the Hahn study, confirms the ways in which these conclusions on civic life and democratic education apply to Australia. Both these studies indicate the need to be cognisant of the deficiencies of our past practices and policies, and to eschew those deficiencies in our present and future policies, and their implementation.

The importance of not closing off the possibilities for effective delivery of a participatory civics and citizenship curriculum cannot be overstated. The need for a curriculum which empowers young people to feel commitment to their democratic rights, and their role in the decision-making processes in their communities and governments, cannot be overstated. The findings of this study into the political attitudes of Year 11 students in one state of the nation, demonstrate the indigent condition of young people's attitudes to their political context. If it is agreed that their negativity of political attitudes is a serious impediment to the future effective functioning of our participatory, democratic, political system, efforts to improve those attitudes must be undertaken. It is too serious a matter for politicians to decide alone. The findings of this research into Victorian students' political attitudes indicate that the students involved in this study would not have considered politicians the appropriate people to be the principal deciders, in these matters.
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Civic Understanding and Political Attitudes

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Civic Learning and Political Attitudes