

## **Climate emergency, student protests and school leadership**

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Climate change activism has increasingly mobilised student civic participation in recent years. Sparked by Greta Thunberg's lone protest, schoolchildren from around the world have spilled out of their schools and engaged in civic activism on the streets and online. In Australia, the student-led climate protests of 2019 were met with condemnation by many politicians. The Australian prime minister himself said that young people's place was in the classroom, and that he wanted to see "more learning in schools and less activism".

For school leaders, the disjunct between teaching civic responsibility and doing civic activism sees them having to navigate a fine line between sanctioning walkouts and meaningfully engaging on the issue of climate justice. While some experts argued at the time that schools and governments need to support students, school leaders were caught in a balancing act between supporting students whilst managing the expectations of the school community and relations of authority. School leaders' responses ran the gamut from support (with parent approval), to telling students that they would be disciplined for non-attendance at school. Some school leaders, without any sense of irony, even suggested that students should strike on a non-school day.

While educators might use curriculum resources in their schools and classrooms to teach about the climate emergency, the question of citizenship-by-doing raises difficult questions about how learning about civic values and responsibilities might be divorced from practising these understandings. In this presentation, we use discourse analysis to examine the media representations of the students' participation in the Big School Walkout for Climate Action in 2019 and the 2020 strikes, with special attention to the responses of politicians, educators and school leaders. In doing so, we explore the problematic discourse of 'engagement' through which children's civic participation is understood, problematise the tensions for school leaders between 'doing' school and 'doing' climate justice, and consider the protest paradigm being constructed in the press.

As the climate emergency and its effects escalate over coming decades, we seek to generate much needed research about the relationship between climate crisis, schooling and school leadership. We aim to provoke thinking about the obligations of schools to young people and the preparedness of school leaders to engage in supporting civic action. We think through the possibilities of a more meaningful engagement for schools and their leaders, but also explore the current limits and threats to such a politics of courage.