

Editorial

For the past two decades, many countries have increased a focus on civics, citizenship, and political literacy in education. The reasons for this are multiple and include the desire by governments and civic society to promote “good” citizenship, foster a sense of inclusion and inculcate virtues of responsibility and active participation. In addition, citizenship education provides the means to potentially address a number of complex social, political, and environmental issues, from declining voter turnout to enhancing national security (Arthur, Davies, & Hahn, 2008; Brooks & Holford, 2009; Nelson & Kerr, 2006).

In keeping with these international trends, there has been a similar interest in civics and citizenship education across government and non-government sectors in Aotearoa New Zealand in response to a rapid decline in levels of youth voting, the growing diversification of New Zealand’s population, and pressing social, environmental, and economic concerns (Wood & Milligan, 2016). The emergence of new forms of youthful political participation and new opportunities for civic engagement have also provoked debate about the nature of citizenship learning and civic knowledge within Aotearoa New Zealand citizenship education (Hayward, 2012). While themes of citizenship have been an implicit feature of the school curriculum for over a century, *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) has placed a heightened priority for citizenship as a cross-curricula theme, alongside the key competency of *participating and contributing* and more active forms of citizenship within subjects such as social studies—opening up further opportunities in this area.

However, while there is growing interest in citizenship education, there is less agreement about what form citizenship education should take and how teachers should juggle the competing expectations of such programmes. Brooks and Holford (2009) suggest that there are enduring tensions in citizenship education that centre on how schools deliver citizenship education and find the balance in curricula between “knowledge transmission” on one hand and “active citizenship” on the other. There is also debate over the extent to which citizenship education can resolve social divisions and

whether the focus should be on local, national, or global scales of citizenship. Put simply, citizenship education is a hotly contested area of curriculum, teaching and learning.

Against this background the authors included in this special edition of *set*, responded to the challenge to write for, and engage, busy teachers and school leaders. The resulting collection offers some inspiring evidence-based thinking and suggestions for teaching and learning about *civics* (loosely defined as knowledge, skills, and shared expectations of citizens who participate in, and sustain, democracies), *citizenship* (understood here as both a legal status of having rights and responsibilities and a lived experience of being, belonging, and participating in a community), and *political literacy* (the critical thinking skills to understand and interpret information, make informed choices, and consider the power relationships and consequences of decisions).

In editing this special issue we were conscious that without careful reflection, citizenship education can reinforce narrow and culturally exclusive forms of citizenship that fail to account for diverse groups in society, the different ways that people actually participate, and the political circumstances in which students are situated (Arnot & Swartz, 2012; Kennelly & Dillabough, 2008; Lister, 2007). This theme is explored in two opening articles in this special issue which critique the type of civic knowledge and citizenship we are teaching and ask whose citizenship and what values are prioritised?

Morgan Godfery introduces some of the debates in his He Whakaaro Anō piece by reminding us that in a diversifying nation, our approach to citizenship cannot rest on a “one size fits all” approach. Article 3 of the Treaty of Waitangi conferred the rights of universal citizenship on Māori but as Godfery reminds us, citizenship has always been contested and conditional for Māori. In this light, Godfery’s offers examples from conversations with teachers thinking about ways to think about citizenship as group rights, and how to build trust and local history knowledge while fostering tikanga through group participation in shared curriculum development.

Nathan Matthews continues this discussion by advocating for a new vision of citizenship education

for students who identify as Māori. Matthews reminds us that early conceptions of citizenship embedded in the New Zealand curriculum from 1877 were focused on creating loyal subjects for the British Empire. He challenges today's teachers and students to offer strong counter-identities to resist the negative effects of colonisation and encourages a mind-shift which more fully acknowledges Māori as tangata whenua. He offers the politically charged example of a new kura hourua/ partnership school which has nurtured the vision of three pou which support and sustain this approach to education: Kia Māori—Live as Māori with mana; Kia Mātau—Be educated; and Kia Tū Rangatira—Actively participate as citizens of the world.

A second key theme developed by authors in this special issue explores how and why citizenship should also be taught in active and experiential ways (Ross, 2012). New Zealand has led the way in this regard by including a provision for students to undertake “personal social action” to gain credits in NCEA. However, as Rose Atkins, Rowena Taylor and Bronwyn Wood describe, this is more complex than one may initially imagine. Drawing on research from five New Zealand secondary schools they argue that undertaking social action is a messy and somewhat unpredictable process—in keeping with the nature of democratic participation. Their research suggests that this requires thoughtful planning and time for students to choose topics they feel emotionally engaged with, building knowledge and practical skills often in association with individuals and groups in wider communities.

Articles in this special issue confirm that the processes of teaching citizenship are never politically neutral, but neither are classrooms. As Philippa Hunter and Janina Rack argue in their study of advancing political literacy, power relationships operate everywhere in young people's everyday life, particularly in school settings, and the challenge for teachers is to democratise conversations and ways of learning about political concepts so that the experience of learning about citizenship is empowering. Their research, based in two diverse high schools, shows that young people are keen to be involved in politics and have their voices and opinions heard but also suffer from low levels of confidence and political knowledge.

How we teach citizenship and what difference it makes is a theme picked up and explored by Jane Abbiss in the context of teaching skills of critical literacy in social studies and across the social sciences. Abbiss reminds us that critical thinking questions “truths” and is an important skill to employ within written texts, visual texts, and aural texts. Supporting students as they learn to identify the source of information, and ask questions about the nature of evidence and the implication of

arguments, is vital for empowerment. Her article provides examples of pedagogical strategies that can enhance critical questioning when engaging with texts and media sources in social studies.

Turning their focus to citizenship teaching within experiences beyond the classroom or school, Andrea Milligan and Sarah Rusholme explicitly take their discussion into Wellington's civic institutions, exploring how museums and other cultural sites can encourage a sense of inclusion and foster an understanding of wider national values. Their discussion also begins to explore the difficult tensions between nation building and encouraging skills of critical citizenship. They note that students frequently struggle to see civic institutions as other than authoritative and uncontroversial. They encourage education professionals to consider enriching visits to cultural institutions through provocative questions and preparation in conceptual understandings to support students to think about local histories and counter narratives.

Developing the theme of citizenship engagement outside the traditional classroom, Karl Kane and Tim Parkin consider the potential for new digital tools for online engagement. Their article profiles three online tools which have been used in recent national and local government elections. They argue that digital design has a growing role to play in political engagement (see also Howie in final section of this issue). Jocelyn Pappriell also explores the possibilities of citizenship education beyond the classroom, for example in partnership with local councils. Like Matthews, Pappriell examines a controversial example (Environment Canterbury), where wider democratic power has been removed in local decision-making, yet local youth are encouraged to reclaim the citizenship skills to contest decisions about water management in their community. Her article highlights how developing skills of dialogue and active engagement around “wicked problems” such as water management equips young people with citizenship skills to face further environmental, social, and political issues in the future.

Finally, this *set* issue offers something special, a collection of short exemplars of everyday transformative citizenship learning in an era of growing inequality, multiculturalism and community engagement. Some of these examples draw from Christchurch and we include them as an inspiration for all school communities to consider what it means to rebuild an active citizenry, and a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable community. We profile these as exemplars as creative, imaginative, and practical insights into the democratizing power of civics, citizenship and political literacy. Student participants at a recent New Zealand Political Science Association workshop argued that it is all too easy for citizenship

learning experiences to become the preserve of the “smart” students, an extension activity rather than an everyday right. If this happens, citizenship education risks deepening political inequality, supporting a generation of new über-citizens aware of their rights, responsibilities and opportunities, while other students are increasingly disengaged, unable to consider their own individual and collective interests, and unsure or unaware of ways to effect systemic change.

The eight authors of these exemplars document inspiring examples to this problem which show how citizenship education can be made accessible and relevant to all. The opportunities range from involving young people in formal service based learning, such as Billy Osteen and Sam Johnston’s example of the Student Volunteer Army or Sally Airey and Ryan Reynold’s example of Gapfiller, a grassroots youth involvement in renewing civic life through art and public events following the Christchurch earthquake. Andrew Tzer-Yeu Chen’s example of the work of UN Youth and the discussion by Ashalyna Noa and Josiah Tualamali’i of the Pacific Youth Leadership and Transformation initiative are other examples of community partnerships that support youth leadership from local to international levels. Meg Howie describes her digital innovation: Ask Away, an online tool which young people used extensively in the last elections to connect with political candidates. Returning to the classroom setting, Andrew Wilson gives an example of how civics and citizenship can be taught by providing a unit plan for Year 9 social studies. Finally, we cannot forget the rich resources available for teachers and students from the New Zealand Parliament Education service and the Electoral Commission which Miranda Thomson and Richard Thornton respectively outline. These exemplars remind us that community groups and teachers are growing citizenship education from the flaxroots and New Zealand’s democracy is richer for their efforts.

As the articles included in this special issue demonstrate, there is a lively interest in citizenship learning both within classrooms and in partnership with the wider community. But there are many challenges ahead. We hope that this special issue may inspire deeper and more critical engagement with citizenship education across New Zealand. In a diverse population with deep inequalities, and the absence of a shared curriculum how can Aotearoa New Zealand nurture the values and experiences that sustain a democratic nation? These are challenging questions but vital ones. As Andrew Wilson

(this issue) says, in supporting civics, citizenship and political literacy, we must teach “as if our lives depend on it”—because in doing so, we are building the capacity of citizens both today and tomorrow.

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Bronwyn Hayward and Bronwyn E. Wood

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