

FEATURE

Civics and citizenship education: state of the nation

by **Suzanne Mellor**

Australian Council for Educational Research
Project Manager, MCEETYA National Assessment
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This article outlines developments in the implementation and assessment of the achievement of the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century relating to civics and citizenship education. National and state/territory developments, the key features of civics and citizenship education, and the results of a national program to assess the achievement of these goals are discussed.

Introduction

In April 1999, the state, territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education meeting in the tenth Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), agreed to the new National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century (the Adelaide Declaration). Two of these goals reference civics and citizenship learning outcomes.

Adelaide Declaration Goal 1.3 states that students should:

have the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice, and the capacity to make sense of their world, to think about how things got to be the way they are, to make rational and informed decisions about their lives and to accept responsibility for their own actions.

Adelaide Declaration Goal 1.4 specifies that when students leave school they should be:

active and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia's system of government and civic life.

When the Ministers endorsed the National Goals for Schooling they also set in train the work of measuring and reporting on student achievement and progress in attaining the Goals.

They identified eight areas of schooling for attention, among them civics and citizenship education.

This article outlines developments in the implementation and assessment of the achievement of these goals nationwide. National and state/territory developments, the key features of civics and citizenship education, and the results of a national program to assess the achievement of these goals are discussed.

National developments in civics and citizenship education

Since 2002 and the completion of the Commonwealth's *Discovering Democracy* program, the profile of civics and citizenship education has been significantly enhanced by a number of developments at the national and state/territory levels. These include the:

- formation of civics and citizenship curriculum outcome statements in each educational jurisdiction
- commencement of the National Assessment Program in Civics and Citizenship at Years 6 and 10, to be implemented in a three-year cycle
- publication of the Civics and Citizenship Assessment Domain and associated Key Performance Measures and Domain Descriptors
- development of National Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship.

National Civics and Citizenship Assessment Domain

In 2003 the MCEETYA Civics and Citizenship Assessment Domain was released. This was developed as part of a national plan to assess and report on student achievement against the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century.

The national Civics and Citizenship Assessment Domain has a Year 6 and Year 10 component, each consisting of three levels:

- 1 two Key Performance Measures (the KPMs)
- 2 Domain Descriptors
- 3 Professional Elaboration.

The two KPMs are:

- KPM 1: Civics—Knowledge and Understanding of Civic Institutions and Processes
- KPM 2: Citizenship—Dispositions and Skills for Participation.

Domain Descriptors were written for both KPMs for Years 6 and 10. (The Year 10 descriptors for both KPMs are listed on the next page).

The Professional Elaboration expands on the Domain Descriptors of the Assessment Domain. It elaborates on and contextualises the knowledge, understandings, dispositions and skills that students will be required to demonstrate in the assessment.

The Civics and Citizenship Assessment Domain is available at <www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/_resources/ccap_assessment_domain_2004.pdf>. Additional information about the National Assessment Program can be found on the Civics and Citizenship Education website <www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au>. Click on → *For Teachers* → *National Assessment*.

National Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship

The Statements of Learning for civics and citizenship education were developed by MCEETYA and published in 2006. They are the result of collaborative work by Australian education jurisdictions to achieve greater consistency in curriculum across Australia. The statements set out the knowledge,

skills, understandings and capacities that students in Australia should have the opportunity to learn and develop in the Civics and Citizenship national domain. Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 have been designated as the junctures at which opportunities to develop civics and citizenship knowledge, skills, understanding and capacities exist in the curriculum in the respective jurisdictions. For each level of schooling, the statements are grouped by ‘aspects’—namely ‘Government and Law’, ‘Citizenship in a Democracy’, and ‘Historical Perspectives’.

The statements are not a curriculum in itself, but rather a series of statements about essential opportunities to learn in this particular domain, which state education jurisdictions have agreed to implement in their own curriculum documents, as these come due for review. As such, these documents are primarily intended for curriculum developers.

Further information about the Statements of Learning can be found at <www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au>. Click on → *For Teachers* → *Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship*.

Key features of civics and citizenship education

A key feature of civics and citizenship education is its interconnectedness. Evaluations of effective civics and citizenship education programs indicate that a whole-school approach produces the best learning outcomes. See *Discovering Democracy in Action: Implementing the Program* (Department of Education and Training, Victoria, 2004) for advice on whole-school practice and policy

development in relation to civics and citizenship education (available in PDF form at <www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/teachingresources/civicscitizenship/support>).

What is the difference between civics and citizenship learning outcomes?

Civics and citizenship are two distinct cognitive areas. The two Key Performance Measures used in the National Assessment Program—KPM1 (Civics) and KPM2 (Citizenship)—correspond to the two dimensions in the Civics and Citizenship domain of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS): ‘Civic knowledge and understanding’ and ‘Community engagement’.

In short, civics relates to civic knowledge and citizenship is dispositional (attitudes, values, dispositions and skills). Interpretation lies at the heart of civics and citizenship education, and programs must allow for students to develop and practise this competency.

Civics is the more defined of the two. It can be defined as the *study of Australian democracy, its history, traditions, structures and processes; our democratic culture; the ways Australian society is managed, by whom and to what end*. Even this simple definition indicates there are contested areas to be encountered in the teaching and learning of civics.

On the other hand, *citizenship is the development of the skills, attitudes, beliefs and values that will predispose students to participate, to become and remain engaged and involved in that society/culture/democracy*. These constitute a rich and complex set of



About the author

Suzanne Mellor, Senior Research Fellow, joined ACER in 1990 and has worked on national and international policy and survey research projects. Project management for ACER of civics and citizenship projects has included the 1998 report *What's the Point? Political Attitudes of Victorian Year 11 Students*. She managed the Australian component of the IEA Civics Education Study 1995–2002, and prepared the national report. In 2000–03 she conducted the evaluation of the Victorian *Discovering Democracy* Professional Development Program. In 2003–06 she managed the inaugural National Sample Assessment in Civics and Citizenship of Year 6 and 10 students in 600 schools in Australia.

MCEETYA PMRT CIVICS AND CITIZENSHIP ASSESSMENT DOMAIN FOR YEAR 10: DOMAIN DESCRIPTORS FOR EACH KPM

The Year 10 Civics and Citizenship KPMs assume the Year 6 KPMs have already been achieved by students.

KPM 1: Civics—Knowledge and Understanding of Civic Institutions and Processes

Within secondary schooling this KPM expects that students can:

- 10.1 Recognise that perspectives on Australian democratic ideas and civic institutions vary and change over time.
- 10.2 Understand the ways in which the Australian Constitution impacts on the lives of Australian citizens.
- 10.3 Understand the role of law-making and governance in Australia's democratic tradition.
- 10.4 Understand the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a range of contexts.
- 10.5 Analyse how Australia's ethnic and cultural diversity contribute to Australian democracy, identity and social cohesion.
- 10.6 Analyse Australia's role as a nation in the global community.

KPM 2: Citizenship: Dispositions and Skills for Participation

Within secondary schooling this KPM expects that students can:

- 10.7 Understand that citizens require certain knowledge, skills and dispositions to participate effectively in democratic political and civic action.
- 10.8 Analyse the role of a critical citizenry in Australia's democracy.
- 10.9 Analyse the relationship between democratic values and social justice as an important aspect of Australia's democratic tradition.
- 10.10 Analyse the reasons Australians make choices about participating in political and civic processes.

Source: www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/default.asp?id=9015

understandings, based on both civic knowledge and attitudes or values. They also reference the provision of opportunity to practise civic competencies, is required for effective citizenship education. Without both civic knowledge as defined above and a disposition to engagement, a person cannot demonstrate the required citizenship skills or effectively practise citizenship.

Is Civics and Citizenship a subject?

The short answer is no. Because teaching civics and citizenship will generate learning outcomes that relate to a range of issues and skills, it can be meaningfully connected to any learning area. It is possible to have civics and citizenship learning outcomes built into all curricular and extracurricular activities and programs in schools.

All jurisdictions have civics and citizenship learning outcomes listed in their curriculum documents. In Victoria, Civics and Citizenship is a domain within the Physical,

Personal and Social Learning strand of VELS—it is not a discipline within the Discipline-based Learning strand. In addition, the Physical, Personal and Social Learning strand is one of three equally valued and interwoven strands of VELS, emphasising the importance of whole-school approaches.

MCEETYA National Assessment Program: Years 6 and 10

In 2003, ACER was contracted by MCEETYA to conduct the assessment of a national sample of more than 20 000 Australian Year 6 and Year 10 students in approximately 600 schools in 2004. The assessment comprised multiple-choice and open-ended response questions on concepts such as the rationale for the citizenship pledge, social responsibility, basic historical and political facts and the impact of influencing factors such as the media on democracy. The *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report* was released in late December 2006.

Key findings

Student proficiency in civic knowledge and citizenship skills

The report provides and analyses the results of the 2004 nationwide assessment of civics and citizenship knowledge of Year 6 and Year 10 students and maps the achievement levels demonstrated by students and their understanding of the tested concepts.

The report found that young Australians seemed to appreciate their democracy, but their level of knowledge and understanding of civics and citizenship was less than was expected by a range of experts in the field. These experts set the proficiency standards for Years 6 and 10, after considerable examination of the student achievement data and the scale that had been developed.

The report (page xii) describes the proficiency standards in the following way:

The proficiency standard is a level of performance that would be expected for a student at that year level. Students needed to demonstrate more than minimal or elementary skills to be regarded as having reached a proficient standard. The Proficient Standard for Year 6 was set at Proficiency Level 2 and for Year 10 at Proficiency Level 3.

Students who achieved at Proficiency Level 2 were able to demonstrate accurate responses to relatively simple civics and citizenship concepts or issues, with limited interpretation or reasoning. They could, for example, identify more than one basic feature of democracy or democratic process, have basic understandings of citizens' taxation and/or civic responsibilities, and recognise tensions between democratic rights and private actions.

Students who achieved at Proficiency Level 3 were able to demonstrate comparatively precise and detailed factual responses to complex civics and citizenship concepts or issues, and some interpretation of information. They could, for example, identify the historical event remembered on Anzac Day, clearly understand the mechanisms and importance of secret ballot, and understand the general effect of sanctions in international agreements.

Half of Year 6 students and 39 per cent of Year 10 students met the proficiency standards in Australian civics and citizenship knowledge, as defined for their respective years.

Students lacked knowledge of key information about national events and nationally representative symbols. Students also notably struggled with the concept of 'the common good'—strategies that refer to how individuals can influence systems for the benefit of society. They either didn't understand it, didn't believe in it, or couldn't see how they could exercise it.

According to ACER CEO Professor Geoff Masters:

The results of this assessment indicate a need for a greater emphasis on civics and citizenship education in schools. It is important that Australian students develop a sound understanding of how Australia's government and democracy work in order to participate fully in society.

Two of the findings that surprised the experts and researchers involved Australian history. Only 16 per cent of Year 6 students and 23 per cent of Year 10 students could correctly name the event commemorated on Australia Day. Further, only 17 per cent of Year 6 and 27 per cent of Year 10 students could articulate why Australia Day was sometimes called Invasion Day.

Students also struggled to explain the significance of iconic symbols and events such as aspects of the Australian flag and ANZAC Day. The role of the Governor-General provided another stumbling block with only 7% per cent of Year 6 students and 23% of Year 10 students able to correctly identify official vice-regal duties. The report's authors suggested that more targeted teaching is required if students are to learn about these things.

While the researchers and the experts from state and territory education authorities were somewhat surprised and disappointed at the results, they recognised that students could not have been expected to achieve the relevant proficiency standard if they have not had any formal, consistent curricular instruction in civics and citizenship.

Despite the concerns about the relatively low levels of achievement,

one of the most encouraging aspects was the fact that some students were able to achieve at higher levels than had been expected. It is not possible to know whether this was a result of particular teaching or life experiences, but the specificity of knowledge and complexity of response required (as demonstrated by the item response descriptors) suggests that well-taught students can indeed achieve well beyond the expected proficiency in civics and citizenship.

The data collected in the National Civics and Citizenship Sample Assessment in Civics are taken to be the base from which future measurement of growth in student achievement in this area will be constructed. Subsequent National Civics and Citizenship Sample Assessments may show an improvement in student performance if students receive more consistent instruction in civics and citizenship and if teachers receive quality professional development to assist them to maximise the value of curriculum support programs such as *Discovering Democracy*.

Student participation in civics and citizenship activities outside school

According to the National Assessment Program report, watching the news on television was the most frequent civic-related activity outside school, with four out of five students watching the news at least once a week.

Listening to the news on the radio and reading about current events in newspapers were less frequent activities, with three out of five students listening to the news and one-half of the students reading about current events at least once a week. One-third of the students talked about political and social issues with their family at least once per week. All of these civic activities were more frequent for Year 10 students than Year 6 students.

According to students, opportunities existed in most schools for students to participate in decision-making and school governance activities. More than four-fifths of the students (including nine out of 10 of the Year 10 students) indicated that their school provided an opportunity

for students to be represented on student councils and that student representatives could contribute to decision-making.

More than four-fifths of the Year 6 students, and two-thirds of the Year 10 students, indicated that at school they had learned about governance, the importance of voting in elections and how to represent other students, and were interested in how their school worked. Furthermore, more than nine-tenths of the students agreed that they had learned to work cooperatively with other students and to understand people who had ideas that are different from their own.

Participation in out-of-school civic-related activities appeared to have a moderate contribution to civics achievement among Year 10 students. Specifically, frequent engagement in talking about politics and social issues with family was quite strongly related to civics achievement.

Future assessments of civics and citizenship education

The program of national assessments is ongoing and assessments will be held every three years. ACER will conduct the next phase of the MCEETYA National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship in 2007. Preparation work is under way for the 2007 assessment, which will involve a sample of around 14 000 students at Year 6 and Year 10 levels in over 600 schools. After the student achievement data from the 2007 assessment are analysed it will be possible to determine whether improvement has been made since 2004.

Further information

The *National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report* is available on the MCEETYA website <www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya>.

Curriculum resources

A wide range of curriculum resources suitable for secondary courses incorporating civics and citizenship topics and details about national activities can be found on the Civics and Citizenship Education website <www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au>.