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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26203/rj83-kv93>

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To cite this article: [SIGAUKE, A., (2016. Pre-service teachers' views on civics and citizenship education in the social sciences curriculum at the teacher education level. *Education in the North*, 23(2), pp.75-97]



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Pre-service teachers' views on civics and citizenship education in the social sciences curriculum at the teacher education level

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(Date received: May 2016)

Abstract

The School of Education at the University of New England incorporates civics and citizenship education in the Social Science Education curriculum. While it is assumed that after their studies pre-service teachers will have acquired knowledge and skills to teach this subject in schools little is known about their experiences on this programme at the institution. Yet often it is from this experience at the teacher training level that success in their teaching of the subject in schools can be realised.

This paper reports on a study of pre-service teachers' experiences on this subject at the teacher and school education levels. Data collected through qualitative surveys indicate that while the majority is knowledgeable about citizenship issues they also describe what and how they learnt as 'too theoretical, basic and superficial'. In schools participants find little attention being directed towards teaching citizenship education.

Participants made recommendations that could benefit both teacher education and schools on this subject.

Keywords: Civics education; citizenship education; pre-service teachers; social sciences education; on-line/off-campus; community involvement;

Introduction

This paper discusses a study that explored pre-service teachers' experiences with civics and citizenship education in teacher education and schools at one institution in Australia. It demonstrates the importance of consulting learners (pre-service teachers and school students) and other stakeholders on citizenship education issues in the process of developing education policies and programmes. This is because sometimes rhetoric in official statements, as Scott (2000) points out, is out of touch with reality on the ground. In many cases citizenship education policy and programme designers make assumptions about

content, teaching approaches and relevance to resolving problems at the local, national and international levels. Often educational policy documents are products of particular contexts and constructed for particular purposes. However, as Peskett (2001) points out, these may not always achieve their goals because people targeted are not merely positioned to accept everything. They are active agents capable of interpreting and reacting in ways different from what policy and programme designers expect of them. In support, Fairclough (1992, p. 61) adds:

Social subjects are not merely passively positioned but are capable of acting as agents, of negotiating their relationships in the different discourses that they are drawn into.

This is perhaps why Ball (1994) sees educational policies (including teacher education programmes) as sites of constant contests and struggles. They are not formulated in, nor enter institutional vacuums but are products of multiple agendas and influences. It is therefore important that one is familiar with factors driving policy formulation and, through conversations and other means, what people targeted (pre-service teachers in this study) think and say. This is important because, as O'Donoghue and Punch (2003) note, educational policy is produced, directed and interpreted differently at different levels: macro-, meso- and micro- (institutional) levels such as schools, colleges and universities. As policy passes through these stages each group may have different interpretations of it. By the time it gets to the classroom level, (as school syllabus or teacher education programme), it is likely to be altered as it is subjected to diverse personal and group interpretations and practices. This may be the case with civics and citizenship education programmes in teacher education and schools.

Literature Review

Civics and citizenship education

Civics and citizenship education involves practicing citizenship skills and values that should help learners in resolving personal and community problems. In educational institutions learners on citizenship education programmes are expected to acquire and develop skills and attitudes that enable them to resolve problems related to environmental, political, economic, health and other social issues. At the higher education level, and particularly in teacher education, educators are encouraged to teach trainee teachers to analyse and evaluate their roles as citizens (Smith and Ottewill, 2008) and to engage them with the sometimes-conflictual nature of society so that they can be agents of social change. Only then can citizenship education be “a tool for change and for learners to be agents who can shape future generations” (Wilkins 2007, p.20). In school settings where they interact with students from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds teachers are also expected “to be knowledgeable

about, to demonstrate citizenship skills and values and to appreciate differences" (Leenders, Veugelers and De Kat, 2008, p.168).

However, research has shown that some teachers see civics and citizenship education as being solely about moulding youths from the 'anti-social citizens' they are often perceived to be; teaching them 'good morals' or 'education for character' (Berkowitz, Althof and Jones 2008, p.399). The empowerment of young people can only be realized when they are taught to be critical of the status quo and questioning situations that are often taken for granted (Crick Report 1998).

In education consulting learners on issues regarding programmes such as citizenship education is important because, to a large extent, they can talk from experience about issues concerning the programmes and may suggest strategies on these issues. This is also one way of empowering learners. In the case of pre-service teachers their world-views impact on what they teach, their classroom management strategies and subject discourses (Gearon, 2003). As Print (2008) notes the individual teacher in the classroom is in charge of curriculum: what, when and how it is taught in spite of directives from policies. Thus consulting teachers and pre-service teachers helps in determining whether or not they need training, their attitudes towards such programmes and to allay fears arising from not knowing intentions behind new programmes. Research has shown that sometimes pre-service teachers hold anxieties about incorporating citizenship issues into their teaching as they felt their training had left them unprepared to enhancing citizenship awareness in schools (Wilkins 2007). There is therefore need for trust and co-operative consultations and exchange of views between teacher educators, pre-service teachers and school teachers for the success of programmes such as civics and citizenship education in schools and teacher training institutions.

Civics and citizenship education in Australia

In Australia developments and responses to civics and citizenship education proposals date back to 1989 when the *Discovering Democracy* document (Civics Expert Group, 1994) was published (McIntyre 1995; Print 2008). Over the years there have been mixed responses to proposals at teacher practice level, ranging from lack of knowledge to little implementation of the programme. This is confirmed by studies at teacher practice level and student outcomes in schools (Erelous, 2003; Gore, 2007; McIntyre and Simpson, 2009).

Being a multicultural society Australia expects teachers to be knowledgeable about, and to have skills in, dealing with dilemmas arising from multiculturalism. With persistent political, economic, social and natural disasters elsewhere more people are seeking to settle in Australia. For this and other reasons teachers are expected to be aware of ethnic, cultural and racial differences in their classrooms if they are to function effectively in culturally diverse

environments (Banks 2001). The Australian government position on civics and citizenship education is expressed in a number of documents: The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (2012); the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) (2008) and Tudball and Forsyth, (2009). Throughout its nine pages MCEETYA (2008, p.4) highlights the need for education to contribute in building

a democratic, equitable and just society, that is, a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse and that values Australia's indigenous cultures as a key part of the nation's history, present and future.

This links well with debates on the role that civics and citizenship education could play for young people on issues of multiculturalism and democracy (see ACARA, 2012, p.5 - 11). The Commonwealth Australia document (Tudball and Forsyth, 2009) recommends integrating of civics and citizenship education across the school curriculum while ACARA (2012) proposes a discrete civics and citizenship education subject. As noted elsewhere in this paper the interpretation and implementation of policy directives at the micro-level may differ from original intentions at the macro-level.

While these documents focus on school settings the situation at teacher education varies from one institution to another. How effectively are Australian pre-service teachers trained to deal with these trends? What are pre-service teachers' views and experiences on these propositions? Participants in this study provided some insights to these questions.

The study

Context

The School of Education at the University of New England offers studies for primary and secondary school pre-service teachers at under-graduate and post-graduate levels. Of the ten social science subjects offered four have specific sections on civics and citizenship education. The majority of pre-service teachers study online (off-campus). Participants on this study had previously been enrolled on civics and citizenship education on the social sciences programme (see Table 1). At the time of this study the researcher was no longer teaching these participants.

Table 1: Participants in subjects offering civics and citizenship education

Subject title and level of study (Primary or Secondary)	Participants: On Campus (Face-to-Face)	Participants: Off Campus (Online)	Total
1. Teaching HSIE/SOSE at Primary School	1	11	12
2. Primary School HSIE/SOSE Curriculum and Pedagogy	1	4	5
3. Secondary Education: Society and Environment Curriculum 1	1	14	15
4. Secondary Education: Society and Environment Curriculum 2	0	5	5
Total	3	34	37*

*Actual total participants: 35. Two participants were enrolled on both subjects 3 and 4 making the above total of 37

Aim

This study focuses on two main questions:

1. What are pre-service teachers' views and experiences with civics and citizenship education at the teacher education level?
 - How do they conceptualize civics, citizenship and citizenship education and its role to young people?

- How effective do they find their training in equipping them to teaching the subject in schools; and resolving problems at community, national and global levels?
 - What suggestions for improvement do they have about programmes at this and other teacher education institutions?
2. What are pre-service teachers' views and experiences with civics and citizenship education in schools?
- How do schools organize and teach civics and citizenship education?
 - How did pre-service teachers implement the subject in schools?

Method: Data collection and sampling

The study involved, largely, a qualitative approach in data collection, analysis and presentation that “provides rich data about real life people and situations” (De Vaus, 2002, p. 5). However, Denscombe (2007) advises researchers to take note of the following when using qualitative approaches: firstly, that data analysis and conclusions should be firmly rooted in the data; and secondly, the need to be aware of personal bias and prejudice arising from previous theories and investigations. While the researcher on this study is passionate about issues of civics and citizenship education and has previously conducted research in the same area using similar qualitative approaches, the researcher was aware of the above views and therefore took these into account during the study.

Except for a few demographic data items, a majority of questionnaire items were open-ended asking for in-depth qualitative data. Items focused on the citizenship education programme offered at the study institution and schools where pre-service teachers went for teaching practice.

The university's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) granted ethics approval (HE12-237) for the research. A purposive sampling approach was conducted with participants deliberately selected from units offering civics and citizenship education (see Table 1). However, pre-service teachers had an option not to participate in the study. Firstly, an e-mail requesting their participation was sent out to pre-service teachers followed by an information sheet making it clear that participation was voluntary; therefore, they had the right to withdraw any time. Thirdly, a Participant Consent Form was sent out followed by an on-line questionnaire through Qualtrics software. Eighty-eight (88) responded but only thirty-five (35) completed the questionnaire; these became the sample for the study (Table 1).

Limitations of the study

Denscombe (2007) makes a clear distinction between generalizability and transferability of findings from samples as small as this one. Because of this small sample size, it may be difficult to generalize results from this study to larger populations though they are transferable to samples of similar sizes in similar situations. Secondly, findings are based on a programme that integrates civics and citizenship education issues across the social sciences in teacher education. In other institutions this may not be the case, meaning that pre-service teachers in those institutions are more exposed to civics and citizenship issues than is the case at the institution where this study was carried out. Thirdly, the sample for this study is from one particular institution rather than from institutions across Australia. These findings may therefore only reflect events at this one particular institution. However, in spite of these limitations, findings from this study are important in the general understanding of the position of these pre-service teachers regarding this subject. They are also helpful as guides in what should or should not be considered important in designing the content of and approaches to teaching civics and citizenship education at the teacher education and school levels.

Data analysis

Data analysis involved reading through questionnaire information, identifying major themes, shared opinions and differences; coding and presenting findings under key issues investigated on each the research questions outlined above. These included:

- a) conceptualisation of civics, citizenship and citizenship education;
- b) effectiveness of pre-service teacher training programmes in teaching the subject in schools
- c) effectiveness in resolving problems at local, national and global levels;
- d) suggestions on improvement of programmes at both the teacher and school education levels;
- e) models used in teaching the subject in schools;
- f) value of citizenship education to young people in general.

Findings

Findings are presented in two sections: firstly, pre-service teachers views and experiences with the university programme; secondly, participant views and experiences in schools.

1) Pre-service teachers' views and experiences: Civics and citizenship education in teacher education

First of all the pre-service teachers' views and experiences with civics and citizenship education at the teacher education level where explored.

a) *Participants' understanding of concepts and value of citizenship education to young people*

A majority of definitions made reference to Australia as a supporting example. A few were aware that interpretations of concepts can vary from one individual to another and from group to group; therefore the need to challenge views usually taken as 'the correct' definition. This confirms the general view that in some cases citizenship education, as a social construction, benefits some groups and not others (Davies 2001). One participant added:

The term citizenship is very emotive and draws upon a person's feelings for their country as it is at the time; it is a very broad term and ought to remain so.

In spite of these concerns a majority of participants identified what they thought were positives associated with citizenship: 'participation at the community, society and global levels' and 'to become a human being by contributing to the community, that is, involvement in the political decision making process'. Effective citizens care about the future of their communities; they meet the needs of their country. This is participatory, active or justice-oriented citizenship (Biesta, 2008). One participant summarised this as:

My understanding is that civics is a type of mindset and value system in which people care about others and the larger society they are members of. It relates to social justice, equality, empathy and democracy and the process of demonstrating one's civics. It obligates and demands that one looks to better the society they are a part of; to participate in democracy and make one's voice felt; to use their position to advance the interests of all - especially the disadvantaged; and to be an active member of society by participating in acts that promote civic mindedness and social justice.

While this is a brilliant characterization of citizenship some writers, Barbalet (1988) for instance, doubt whether any government would genuinely offer a subject that teaches students to question and challenge its position and policies.

'Politics', as part of civics and citizenship education again in relation to Australia, is about 'knowledge of the structure of the Australian government and councils and how these work; being informed about these processes'. Again, this does not go beyond 'knowledge of structures and processes' of government (-ing). This is sometimes criticized for not being critical enough (Olssen, 2004; Westheimer and Kahne, 2004) since knowledge of government structures alone contributes little to social well-being.

Third in place, was a group of concepts associated with civics and citizenship education: rights, responsibilities, privileges, duties, values and culture.

Giving students knowledge of the values and culture of being an Australian and how they can become human beings that are thoughtfully and positively contributing and having an impact on their community.

This recognizes the need to go beyond just knowledge of concepts. The last group of concepts concerned the organization and working of society: social structure, rule of law, social justice, tolerance, empathy, equality and concern for others; meeting social needs through legislature; knowledge and respect of the legislature and society's beliefs and mores in order 'to be a good person in society'.

A few participants however, questioned some often taken-for-granted definitions of citizenship:

Teachers have to rethink their understanding of citizenship and civics before they could possibly teach it; and schools have to create situations for students to be actively involved and practice their citizenship in a *safe environment*. Unfortunately not many schools or teachers are prepared to create such an environment. Therefore I find the idea and the studies at university interesting but it is far from the real school life situation [*Italics: my emphasis*].

I really enjoyed the course, in particular the need to question the kind of citizenship educators promote or condone.

A 'safe environment' should be one that allows students to challenge the status quo without being victimised; and in some cases educators are seen as condoning the status quo as they comply with policy demands. As one participant observed there appears to be a disjuncture between what is taught at teacher education and reality in schools.

Concerning the 'education' part of citizenship education six participants had no idea as to what this involved; one added:

After all many schools do not actually specifically teach civics and citizenship except in passing and in ways that it is not obvious to the students what is being taught.

For this participant citizenship issues would still be covered anyway even if teachers did not know what this involves. For many participants in this study citizenship education is about Australian politics, history and what it means to be 'Australian'. For others it includes conceptions of democracy, social justice, diversity, equity, rights, obligations and fairness on race, gender and social class in Australia and beyond. The teacher is expected to role model

these; teach about social (in)-equality and about contributing to social change. Student agency should involve:

An awareness of and participation in solving problems within their communities and the larger society thereby developing an understanding of global socio-economic and environmental problems.

This conforms to what Hinchey (2004, p.112) describes as “schooling for participative citizenship”. Education should be about “critically inquiring for social change and in service to many”. Participants felt that schools should empower students with knowledge and skills they can practice in communities.

Taking students out to practice what they can do to recycle and reduce waste and consumption; and how their positive changes positively impact on their environment.

Field trips and other 'real' learning experiences such as role play and interactive teaching would allow students to be actively involved in situations that may assist their understanding of what it means to be a member of the community; and what is involved in making specific choices based on social, political and moral policies and regulations.

Only a few participants acknowledged the need for critical thinking; what Freire (1973) calls 'critical consciousness' or what Hinchey (2008, p.107) describes as “critical pedagogy in schools, not just a pedagogy that commits to making children receptive or docile...not one that denies human dignity and freedom”.

So...in all aspects of the curriculum students should be directed toward questioning the principles and framework in which we live: why do we have freedom, what is it? Why can we vote, what does that entail and what are you responsible for when you do or don't vote?

I want to engage them in ways so that they think critically about the world around them and the power structures in society and how such structures may operate to further the interests of the majority or the elite at the expense of others. I want to make them aware of facts and events that demonstrate that 'standing by' or being selfish is antithetical to civics; and to encourage them to be active in their school, their community and their own learning. I want them to be curious and critical and I plan to use such things as questioning techniques, discussions, ICT, co-operative learning and multimodal

representation of material so that students learn more effectively and that they internalise civic mindedness.

The major basis for teaching citizenship education is critical thinking, so creating an environment that is safe for the students to state their opinion is the first and most difficult step. The students have to develop a confidence in themselves to make decisions based on their experience and their accumulated knowledge to the situation/problem. They also have to learn that as students they have possibilities to have influence and take responsibility for what they believe in. Unfortunately schools do not support this.

Again, the issue of a 'safe environment' is mentioned above. These participants are also concerned about the social reproduction role of the education/school system that does not seem to challenge the status quo nor support social change (Kincheloe, 2008; Apple, 2010; Darder, 2002). For these participants, learning about democracy should be number one; and about young people being knowledgeable about and respectful of other cultures, parliamentary processes and contributing to local, national and global community. Yet in an environment where students feel insecure these activities are usually not realized.

Teachers have a responsibility in shaping their students to become ethically and morally upright members of their societies; said one participant.

In a democracy citizenship education empowers young people to be:

Better people in the world; become critical and have a broad perspective about communities while at the same time they become independent of peer pressure.

Citizenship education provides young people with a voice on political issues, voting skills, social roles and a sense of belonging.

This subject offers insight into how our democratic system functions which will allow them to make considered and informed decisions as they participate in this system. It encourages both appreciation of our rights and responsibilities and therefore demonstrates that each person has an important role to play in maintaining and improving the systems to achieve social cohesion. It illustrates to young people how they can make important changes through a number of avenues.

These views are supportive of an empowering citizenship education that takes a critically look at the status quo; a citizenship education that benefits the socially disadvantaged. They demonstrate participant knowledge of key concepts regarding civics and citizenship (education) and the value of civics and citizenship education to young people.

b) Effectiveness of university programme in equipping pre-service teachers to teach and resolve problems at local, national and global levels

Ten participants were sure the university programme had made positive contributions to their skills; eleven had reservations; and majority, fourteen, were openly negative. On the positive side the programme was described as:

Excellent...stressing investigative learning proved invaluable in dealing with K-2nd in a small school setting, allowing quality flexible learning throughout the age spectrum involved.

Brilliant: I've completed two pracs at a boys high school that is overwhelmingly monoculture, middle eastern Muslim boys...in all the HSIE subjects I participated in there is a constant push towards what it means to be part of and to participate in modern Australia, not just within your community within Australia.

It opened my mind...I liked that it was a bit radical. I think it needs to be so if we are going to question honestly and create new ways of being in the world.

I feel well prepared; I believe I have an understanding of who I am and where I come from and the need to always remember to value the background of all students. To use language and gestures that do not disadvantage different students. To educate students to think - to show them the facts but allow them to develop their own opinions. To facilitate students to be active members of their communities and be a part of future solutions.

The majority who were negative described it as 'irrelevant' to school requirements: "No, it was not relevant to the school where I did my prac". Others felt the programme was too theoretical; it lacked practical activities.

Very basic information.

Very superficial.

I felt that it was lacking, however it did provide me with some basic information to start my own knowledge base.

These negative comments should raise some concern among programme designers as they point at the need for consultations with stake-holders when designing programmes.

On the effectiveness of the programme in equipping participants to resolving problems at the local, national and global levels ten were negative, with some blaming the online approach as not providing opportunities for them to practice in communities. The programme was also blamed for being too focused on written assignments that did not allow for practical activities. While many of the university's programmes are online, with regards to citizenship activities, participants in this study do not see this approach as giving them opportunities to work with communities. Some writers have also been critical of the role of technology in this regard (see Inoue-Smith, 2014; Jones and Ryan, 2014; Orlando, 2014). Hinchey (2004, p.77) describes online teaching as "turning the business of teaching to computers". Two participants were clearly negative, with one stating:

Common sense and my public knowledge is what has helped me to assist students in understanding situations at local and global levels.

c) Suggestions for programme improvements at this and other institutions

Most suggestions were on assessment, content, resources and teaching approaches involving practical activities.

Working in schools is all I can encourage. Being hands on and having to do it is a lot more effective than learning it out of a textbook or online. You are not actually putting anything into practice when creating assignments or completing exams on citizenship.

On assessment, collaborative group or short research assignments were suggested, with one participant directing comments to university lecturers:

You [university lecturers] are all still working within the paradigm that racism and issues pertaining to gender discrimination are the exclusive purview of the so called white privileged; get out there and get updated on the reality, seriously.

Others suggested involving school teachers in designing syllabuses focusing on skills development and cultural issues. This confirms suggestions made in an earlier section of this paper concerning consultations on policy issues.

2. Civics and citizenship education in schools

Secondly the pre-service teachers' views and experiences with civics and citizenship education in schools were investigated.

a) Models used in teaching civics and citizenship education in schools

Table 2: Civics and citizenship education models in schools and pre-service teacher preferences

Models	Model at my school	Model I like
As specific/separate subject	2	5
Integrated into subjects related to social sciences	16	14
Integrated into all subjects taught at school	4	9
As an extra-curricular activity	0	0
Not sure/not taught	13	7
Total	35	35

Participants were presented with a list of models for teaching citizenship education and asked to indicate what they preferred most and why. The integration model was most popular.

This helps students become familiar with citizenship in every subject not just one. They are able to see it through PE (sporting organisations in a community) or through HSIE and politics or through Music and Creative Arts in a school and its surrounding communities, etc.

Doing this gives a practical application of the information being taught.

Students get to see citizenship in a number of contexts.

In previous sections of this study participants have consistently defined citizenship education as the practical application of citizenship ideas in communities. This is repeated here. However, participants point out that little of this is happening in schools where they taught. At the school level the focus of citizenship education was mainly on Australian history, government structures and processes and social events, environmental degradation, social justice/inequalities, celebrations from different countries/cultures, values and cultural diversity.

Typical news headline material: 'boat people', 'berkas' - but to say they were covered is incorrect. More like the subject came up, everyone expressed their

personal view and then moved on. There was no education that came from it. No real difference to twitter or face book noise on the issues really.

They all took turns in taking the recycling and food scraps bin to appropriate places and would talk about why they needed to have each bin, teaching them how to assist with waste reduction.

These comments express some dissatisfaction with the way the subject was being implemented in schools – the reality at the micro-level (O'Donoghue and Punch, 2003).

Others suggested teaching students to think critically on women's rights, democracy and voting rights, environmental degradation, and personal and professional ethics.

I think the school could have made improvements in 'connecting' students with each other and with the local community through the use of social groups and volunteer programmes.

I tried to encourage some critical thinking on the topic of beginning and responsibility of WW1 but the students were very reluctant to think about anything that was not needed for the HSC prep.

The position of a subject in the examination system for any country is controversial, (see Sigauke, 2011). Generally, it appears that where the focus is on assessment the relevance of the subject to the community is compromised unless community participation becomes part of the assessment process. This ignores one of the central aims of citizenship education: to enable young people to be voluntarily active in their communities (active citizens/-ship).

b) How did pre-service teachers teach the subject in schools?

One participant reported: "It was taught accidentally but not formally as this was not assessed". Again assessment is mentioned as a necessary part of teaching this subject if it is to be regarded as worthwhile in the curriculum. Twelve participants taught it through either: internet research; reading and discussions; as issues integrated in other subject areas; using picture books, videos, worksheets, quizzes, project work and invited guest speakers. Lessons focused on social justice and inequality, HIV/AIDS, rights and freedoms and the changing nature of the Australian society.

Suggestions for improvements focused on teacher training and motivation, new teaching approaches and content integration into other subjects. Three participants felt student motivation, again through assessment, should come first. Diversification of teaching resources is important: "reading alternative newspapers, assessing the role of media,

watching documentaries, conversing and listening” including critical analysis of the media on local and global issues. However, little of this critical analysis is taking place in schools where these participants were teaching. Fourteen participants suggested that this subject be assessed like others in the curriculum; six felt it should only be assessed as an integrated subject or only at the senior level:

Not in Stage 4 or below.

I think that may be in Year 6.

I believe knowledge should be assessed rather than a student's conviction because some students, from my own experience, hold religious beliefs that conflict with some nationalistic convictions (taught in citizenship education) and this can be confronting and disturbing for these students. Knowledge, on the other hand, is something that any student can attain regardless of their religious views.

For this third participant assessment has to distinguish between personal convictions and general knowledge, that is, respect for personal positions. Nine participants did not see the need for assessment:

I think that it is too difficult to assess as it is more of a personal issue rather than an academic one.

Generally, schools did not assess citizenship education as a separate subject since it was integrated in other subject areas. ACARA (2012) however, recommends a discrete subject but is silent on assessment.

As Fairclough (1992) points out social agents are not passive; they may have views that differ from those of policy-makers, as is the case here. Twenty-seven participants strongly agreed with the suggestion that: ‘Every teacher in schools and across all subjects must be in a position to teach civics and citizenship education’.

I feel this is important and it helps the students examine the knowledge and skills from many different angles and applications to life.

Good in theory, however in practice I don't think teachers have the physical resources to take on anymore responsibilities.

Yes, I agree, it should be something that every role model to any young person should be aware of; what makes a model citizen in our society.

Only two had doubts:

This would be ideal, however the religious beliefs of many skilled teachers at times may conflict with a small part of citizenship education.

Agreed in principle, but difficult to achieve in an apolitical way - the professional body has not traditionally been selected and trained with this in mind, and may struggle to accommodate the degree of objectivity to address issues such as workforce participation, industrial relations and the political process.

Four totally rejected this idea, with one adding:

No, every teacher across all subjects can teach every aspect of citizenship education.

These comments provide insights on whether or not citizenship education should be compulsory at the teacher education level. Participants worry about transgressing personal convictions (for example, religious beliefs) when issues of citizenship education are 'forced' on individuals. This would be against personal rights, a central issue in citizenship education.

How effective is this subject in schools in resolving community problems? Twenty-four were strongly positive on this with some adding:

Yes, absolutely, as long as it isn't just students who are learning citizenship education. In the area I live in, there is a raft of socio-economic, race and historical-political issues that will only be addressed with time and wider societal understanding.

Students here, because of our small community, have a lot to do with this anyway. I think they are learning a lot about it and helping within the community without even realising. It is not emphasised as the learning area, it is just included in all areas and the students enjoy being a part of the community and helping out.

Empathy, respect, values and responsibility in the community could all be improved if citizenship education were to be employed for solving problems in the community. Education is the first step in developing and maintaining effective relationships between individuals and their role in the community as well as with other people.

Absolutely. By creating respectful and ethical students who are concerned about members of their local community, I believe we would definitely see a reduction in juvenile crime.

The second quotation above suggests involving learners in community activities without focusing on the assessment or discrete subject aspects. Four participants felt that, in theory, it would be helpful with one adding:

I think it's a good topic to help people in any community, however, you can see why young people don't take an interest in civics.

This could be referring to assessment discussed above. Three participants had a definite 'No' but, like the above, did not say why not. These views should reveal to policy and education programme designers the need to re-think approaches to designing policies and programmes. They would benefit from consulting stake-holders such as those involved in this study and the community.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study focused on pre-service teachers' views and experiences with civics and citizenship education programme at the teacher education level and schools where they went for teaching practice. The paper is guided by the view that rhetoric in policies and other official statements (teacher education programmes and school syllabuses) is not always the reality on the ground (in teacher education institutions and schools). In the area of education that reality can best be known through consulting people on the ground – school students, pre-service teachers and teachers already in the field.

The majority of pre-service teachers in this study demonstrated an understanding of concepts related to civics and citizenship with some giving examples of associated activities. While the majority was able to cite examples from Australia only a few extended this to the global level. Yet in Australia Global Education is part of the school curriculum in most states (see <http://www.globaleducation.edu.au/>). It is also apparent from participant responses that there is little critical questioning of the often taken-for-granted conceptions of civics and citizenship – that being a citizen means uncritically accepting what authorities define as 'citizenship'. This is unconsciously repeated by participants in examples of what and how to teach the subject in schools. Perhaps because of the multicultural nature of the Australian society participants are aware of the need to be tolerant of cultures different from theirs. This links well with expectations of some Australian policy documents on civics and citizenship education such as ACARA (2012) and MCEETYA (2008).

Concerning the effectiveness of the university's programme a majority felt they did not gain anything new from the programme, describing what they learnt as 'too theoretical and lacking practical activities'; for example, assessment is only through written assignments. Some blamed this on the 'online/off-campus' approach to studies (see also Hinchey 2004); while others described the content as 'too basic and superficial'. These are issues that programme developers at this and other institutions need to address and, as participants suggested, need to include practical activities in communities both as part of the teaching and assessment processes.

At most schools where participants taught, civics and citizenship education was integrated in various subjects perhaps following recommendations of the Commonwealth of Australia document (Tudball and Forsyth, 2009). Yet on the other hand ACARA (2012) recommends a discrete civics and citizenship education subject. Few respondents were positive to the question about how they taught this subject; may be a reflection of their lack of confidence in teaching the subject and/or the little attention it gets in schools. Participants were at different school types: private and public; religious and non-religious. This, as Leenders, Veugeler, and de Kat (2008) note, may affect subject content and teacher commitment because school ethos, social commitment and student discipline influence teachers' commitment to implementing citizenship goals. These vary from one school type to another. Education policy and programme designers need to take these issues into account when designing civics and citizenship education programmes.

Participants made suggestions on what and how to improve programmes at both the teacher and school education levels. These include: subject content, teaching approaches, resources and involving schools and communities in designing programmes at university level. At the school level integration of civics and citizenship education across the whole school curriculum would ensure most teachers are aware of and can teach this subject at all levels. However, as Evans (2008) points out, sometimes there are local contextual pressures that are in conflict with expected goals and practice of civics and citizenship education. These include schools' hierarchical organizational structures, emphasis on obedience on the part of teachers and students, accountability expectations on the part of teachers and other competing educational goals. As noted above, the suggestion on integrating civics and citizenship education across the curriculum seems to contradict the ACARA (2012) document that proposes a discrete citizenship education subject in schools.

Implementing findings from this study at this and other institutions should help improve the position of the subject at the teacher and school education levels in Australia and elsewhere. It is not enough to rely on policy statements but also necessary to consult those involved in the subject – school students, pre-service teachers and teachers already in the field.

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