Civics and Citizenship Education: A tale of two classes

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Abstract
During the last five years, the federal government’s interest in civics, the Discovering Democracy project and various other initiatives in the area, have resulted in a heightened awareness of civics and citizenship education. Research that was going on throughout that period has provided an opportunity to examine what has been happening in the classroom. This paper takes a detailed look at how civics and citizenship education was approached in two New South Wales schools. Using a case study approach, the focus of this paper is on the practical application of civics and citizenship units in the classroom.

The research presented will outline units of work prepared and delivered by two teachers in seemingly similar schools. By looking at these units, comparing and contrasting their approaches and the student response, it is hoped that some ideas may be formulated as to the space civics and citizenship education could occupy in schools in the future. The different experience of each classroom will be invaluable in indicating the variety of experiences that are possible within approaches to civics and citizenship education.

Introduction
This is the tale of two classrooms. On the surface they appear to be very similar. Both are located in private secondary girls schools in the Sydney region and both have teachers passionate about their subject. The teacher of each class was provided with an opportunity to create and trial a civics and citizenship education unit of their own devising. The opportunity to look into these two classrooms as they undertake trailing the new unit, allows the different experiences of civics and citizenship education to be presented. It is possible to witness the type of approaches that are to be found in schools across Australia as civics and citizenship education gains momentum.

Following a brief overview of the recent events in civics and citizenship in Australia, with a particular focus on New South Wales, the two classes will be put in the context of their school and teacher. The teachers and their experience, background, and attitude towards civics and citizenship education will be given central importance for the role they play. The unit will be outlined and the pedagogical approaches discussed. The student reaction to the unit will also contribute to the attempt to find the space that civics and citizenship education occupies in the classroom and the school.

Civics and Citizenship Education in Australia
The recent history of civics and citizenship education in Australia is an intriguing one. Throughout the eighties there were repeated attempts to bring it to the fore of the education agenda. Two government reports, Education for Active Citizenship in Australian Schools and Youth Organisations and Active Citizenship Revisited (Senate Standing Committee on...
Employment, Education and Training (SSCETT 1989, 1991), both called for the inclusion of civics as part of the formal school curriculum. However, despite some sympathy from interested parties, the recommendations were not acted upon. Print (1997; 129) argues that these reports and similar efforts that were occurring at the time "individually...had merit, but collectively they failed to make a significant impact on the school curriculum in the respective Australian states. Most notably these initiatives in civics education were unable to create a critical mass of interest amongst students, teachers, parents or educational bureaucrats."

The coming of age for civics was inextricably tied to the Prime Ministership of Paul Keating. During his time as Prime Minister of Australia, Keating ensured that civics was put firmly on the educational agenda of the nation and was, in turn, incorporated into curriculum. He undertook this mission and, where others had failed, he managed to gain approval for the appointment of a Civics Expert Group (CEG) to investigate the situation. Armed with the brief to establish the knowledge levels of Australians about their nation, the Group proceeded to present a report that presented both findings and recommendations. The report, Whereas The People...succeeded where both reports on ‘Active Citizenship’ had failed despite similar findings about levels of knowledge. With Keating championing the cause, and the attention of the Australian people focused on the issue, $25 million was pledged to make sure the recommendations of the expert group (including the formal inclusion of civics education into school curriculum) became a reality.

Before this transition could fully occur, however, a federal election and change of government resulted in a freeze of the funding for the project. This freeze was a temporary measure until an investigation was conducted into the area, resulting in the new Education minister, Dr Kemp, released the plans for Discovering Democracy in 1996. Not unlike the original plan laid out by the Civics Expert Group and supported by Keating, Discovering Democracy advocated the inclusion of civics education in the classroom. It was a national initiative, a recommendation to all states to embrace civics, and find a place for it in their curriculums. To assist this process, the government (in the guise of the new Civics Education Group) instructed the Curriculum Corporation to develop and distribute a set of materials to schools Australia-wide.

The New South Wales Experience
Each state and territory had a different reaction to the recommendations of the Civics Education Group. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training embarked on the implementation of civics education by first directing the NSW Board of Studies to ensure that there were explicit outcomes and content relating to civics education in the curriculum. This resulted in the production by the NSW Board of Studies of a Citizenship Education Framework. The draft format of this document was distributed to all schools and relevant stakeholders for consultation, before it was endorsed for use by syllabus developers in November 1996.

An exercise followed using the framework to establish the extent to which civics and citizenship education existed in the NSW syllabuses, in which it was found “there was no systematic and coherent program in civics and citizenship education” (Curriculum Corporation 1999). This resulted in a period of syllabus review in New South Wales, which was not without contention and controversy. Where civics and citizenship fitted into the curriculum became the centre of debate. In their recommendations to include civics in formal schooling, the Civics Expert Group
had not gone to the extent of recommending its installment as a discrete new school subject. This was a recognition, in part at least, of an already overcrowded curriculum (Print et al. 1999:43).

The decision was made in New South Wales for secondary schools to incorporate civics into the new mandatory Australian History and Geography syllabuses for years 7 –10. Civics was formally introduced in the NSW curriculums in 1999, and has been since included in the year 10 School Certificate assessment with “a two-hour test in aspects of Australian History and Australian Geography, incorporating Civics and Citizenship” (Board of Studies 1998:5). In both syllabuses, there is a rationale dedicated to explaining their role in creating informed and active citizenship.

The Benchmarking Project
The re-birth of civics in the Australian school curriculum has meant renewed interest and research into the area. One of these projects, the Civics and Citizenship Benchmarking Project, formed the parameters of this research study. The Benchmarking project, funded by the Australian Research Council, was undertaken as a collaborative research project by the New South Wales Department of School Education, the Board of Studies and the University of Sydney. The project aimed to identify critical student understandings and attitudes towards civics, with the intention to develop a “means for measuring these and any changes that result from teaching the syllabus and using curriculum materials” (Print 1997a:4).

Schools from New South Wales were invited to trial the civics benchmarks developed by the Civics and Citizenship Benchmarking project. Approximately forty schools actively participated in the first trial (conducted in the final school term of 1997), and another group of over twenty schools involved in the second. Following the trials, a revision of the benchmarks, in consultation with the teachers was completed. To date there has been no official sanction or release of the benchmarks in secondary schools.

This research study discussed in this paper is not an attempt to prove the need for, or endorse the Civics and Citizenship Benchmarks. The trialling of the benchmarks provided the medium for this research to be conducted, and through another perspective from which to view it, granted the opportunity for a more comprehensive look at civics and citizenship education in New South Wales. The four schools that were used as sites for case studies documented in this study, were each given a copy of the Benchmarks and left to use/implement it at their own discretion.

The Schools
There were four schools involved in the research project. The two that are being discussed in this paper were chosen for their apparent similarities. They are both private girls schools in the greater Sydney region of approximately the same size student body. Both schools have relatively small classes sizes and are known for their dedicated teaching staff. The division of civics into the History and Geography syllabuses is reflected in the two classes observed.

Each teacher was interviewed before, twice during and after completing the unit. Non-participant class observations allowed to researcher access to the delivery of the unit and focus groups.

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2 There is also a civics-related unit “Government” still included in the NSW Year 7-10 Commerce syllabus.
3 May be referred to as the “Benchmarking project” for the purpose of this study.
provided a student perspective. Both teachers were very forthcoming in access to their time and class.

**Harbour View College**

Harbour View College is an all girls, Catholic school catering for both primary and secondary students. Based in Sydney, it has both day and boarding students. There are approximately 450 students in the senior school and forty teachers plus support staff. Harbour View is a physically attractive school, although teachers express some doubts about the practicality of its teaching spaces. There is also a space shortage that means constraints on classes. Despite being an apparently wealthy school, teachers argue that it is not “overawed with resources” and that they are often forces to rely on their own creativity.

There is a concern that there is a perceived public image of the school as a “finishing school for girls” which appears at odds with the ethos of the school. The school was started by an order of nuns dedicated to life long education for women, in a time where it was unusual for females to be well educated. The position of Principal, which had always been held by a nun, was filled seven years ago by a non-sectarian male.

The school has a strong leadership structure and pastoral care system focusing on student involvement. There are democratic elections for prefects and a committee structure. A leadership committee meets weekly with the Principal. It is through this group that any student issues or suggestions are presented.

The students at Harbour View College come relatively similar backgrounds, with the differences tending to be geographic, rather than economic. The existence of the boarding arm of the school means that students attend from overseas, rural and regional areas of Australia as well as the local suburbs. Until recent years, there was a minimum distance from the school a student’s family must live before they could be excepted as a boarder. However, the current administration has accepted boarders whose parents live in close proximity to the school. This is in part a reaction to lower of number of boarders coming from the country as a result of the rural crisis. As is the increased attempts to attract overseas students, particularly from Asia. The school employs ESL (English as a Second Language) support staff and there has been a change in the boarding house menu to reflect the increase in numbers.

A strong factor in choosing Harbour View College is related to tradition. Many of the girls attending the school are sent there primarily because their mothers and grandmothers are former students. There appears to be a strong ethos of involvement throughout the school. Students are very much encouraged to get involved in whole range of activities, from sport and drama through to community service. Andrea believes that a benefit of the students at Harbour View is their willingness to “give it a go”. The committee structure, the traditional events of the school and a vast array of available activities, means that the students are “very, very much involved in the school, the sort of school spirit thing is extraordinary. It’s much working in groups, doing things”.

**The Station School**

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4 All quotes not otherwise attributed, are made by the relevant teacher.
The Station school is slightly larger than Harbour View College, with approximately 550 students enrolled. It has both a primary and secondary school, but does not offer boarding facilities. There is a small international contingent whose parents either send them to board with local families, or re-locate to Australia for the duration of their daughters schooling. Again, as a private school, the cost of attendance means that the girls are all of a similar economic background. It is not a selective school, but achieves fairly good academic results according to the staff.

The schools proximity to a large public transport network and business district, mean that it faces a similar space issue as Harbour View. Restructuring of the buildings is an on-going process in order to fit the needs of the students. Some classes are conducted in the library for a lack of an available classroom. This space shortage also means a cap on the number of students attending Station School. The schools’ location is seen as positive though in terms of access to public transport for excursions. These can often be conducted during lunch times with out disrupting the timetable.

The Principal is a dominant figure in the school, closely involved in all aspects of it. All student reports are passed through her office and she conducts weekly “staff information sessions”. Despite this, some of the staff believe she has “little real knowledge of what happens on a day to day basis or in the classroom”. According to the teacher in this research, Ben, the school would benefit from her consulting more with the staff. The staff are very involved in the school outside of their classroom duties, with many assigned extra-curricular roles, such as running the school magazine.

Station School has a prefect system, but has had many unsuccessful attempts at establishing a Student Representative Council. This has been attributed to the constraints placed on it by the Principal. However, there is a high degree of student involvement in a number of areas, such as an environmental club who organise the recycling in the school. The relationship between the students and staff appears relaxed, with many of the staff willingly offering extra support, be it personal or academic, to the students.

The Teachers

Andrea – Harbour View College

Andrea has been teaching at Harbour View College for eighteen years. She is currently Head of the Social Science Department, a position she has held for 10 years at the school. During her eighteen years at Harbour View, Andrea has taken some time off for maternity leave and has be given a term out of the classroom to concentrate on curriculum development. She teaches both junior and senior classes, focusing on geography and economics.

Andrea completed a Graduate Diploma of Teaching at a Catholic Teachers College before taking up her first teaching position at a Catholic 7-10 college in Sydney. She was at the school for 3 years, teaching a broad range of subjects. Following an overseas trip, Andrea taught briefly at a Catholic primary school. She believes that this was an invaluable experience in allowing her to gain a new perspective into student learning, “it was a really good thing for teacher to do because they just assume so much of their students’ understanding of what they are saying, or what they
Andrea does not hold her original teacher training in high regard. She is critical of it being very teacher directed and “limiting in scope. It was looking for the mediocre. I think it was pitching at a point that didn’t allow kids to feel good”. It has been influential however, in forming her views that students and their ways of learning are central to teaching. Andrea also took away the need “to make them feel they have rights as individuals”.

Andrea has been committed to increasing her professional knowledge by undertaking further tertiary study throughout her teaching career. Following her initial teaching qualification, Andrea started a Bachelor of Arts whilst teaching in her first job. Later, whilst employed at Harbour View, she completed a Masters degree in Adult Education. Whilst this was for Andrea “more of an intellectual exercise” than an attempt to enhance her teaching practice, she sees the relevance of what she learnt for teaching her students, particularly in dealing with senior classes. She is also committed to taking up opportunities offered by the school for professional development.

In terms of civics and citizenship education, Andrea is adamant that she has never received any training or professional development. Nor does she think that she has ever taught the subject. She concedes that there may have been some civic-like content in some of her subjects, but she has never taught it “explicitly” or as a discrete area.

**Ben – The Station School**

Ben has been teaching for only eight years. He became a teacher later in life after being expelled from his first attempt at a tertiary degree and working for a number of years in insurance. His drive to return to university meant undergoing a lengthy bureaucratic process to be reaccepted. When he did return it was to the University of Sydney, where he gained an honours degree in Ancient History before completing a Diploma of Education.

His first teaching job was at a newly established specialist senior school in Western Sydney. Although only a casual position, he worked there virtually fulltime for three years. The school had been developed to trial a new schooling model and most of the teachers were picked for their content knowledge, as opposed to their teaching experience. A great deal of professional development was provided to all staff, particularly focusing on student learning methods. Ben is very complimentary of the opportunities for professional growth that were provided and of the holistic approach to students the school took.

Station School is Ben’s first permanent teaching position and he has been there for five years. He is based in the Social Studies department and is one of two senior History teachers. Ben teaches general history to the junior years, both Modern and Ancient History to the senior classes. Since coming to Station School, he has taken on the role of General Studies teacher, and has even written a textbook for the subject. Ben is passionate about the subject areas he teaches and becomes animated discussing them.

He has no formal training in civics and citizenship education, but believes that his History and particularly General Studies background place him in a strong position. He has also been
involved in previous research regarding the introduction of civics to NSW. He took over a trial unit from another teacher at Station School, who was completing it for the Curriculum Corporation. On the basis of this, he was then asked to trial a unit for the Independent Schools Association, before being invited to write an article on the area. Ben sees himself as becoming almost an “expert” in the area, by accident, rather than by design.

Teaching Approach

Andrea

Similar to Ben, Andrea is passionate about the subjects she teaches. She believes that “they are really important for life long learning”. She hopes that this passion for the subject, in turn shows her to be a passionate teacher. Andrea places a great value on this quality in teaching. In employing a new teacher for her department recently, passion for the subject and teaching were a clear attribute for the candidate:

I thought if she stands in front of the class and she can communicate that “I am an enthusiastic alive person”, it’s enough…Emily’s teaching because she wants to… in the end that’s what’s important, what she comes across with in the classroom.

Andrea’s has a strong desire to be aware and up to date with the latest ideas and approaches in teaching. She is interested in what the universities are doing, what is happening in other schools and what research is being done. Part of this desire to be informed is due to a belief that “if you are in education, you have to practice what you preach”. The other factor is the benefit to the student. Andrea is interested in helping her students as much as possible by finding new ideas and techniques. For example, Andrea discusses her “latest thing…is motivation (the reason why students of same ability do better) how can we tap that thing that makes them want to do it…”.

Andrea’s approach in the classroom is a mixture. Her interest in the student’s thoughts and creativity is balanced against a work ethic and a degree of discipline. She views it as challenge to overcome the “traditional” teaching approach of standing at the front of the classroom lecturing and having students copy notes from the board. However, Andrea acknowledges that she is very keen for the students to write a lot. She believes that it is very important that people are able to write clearly. In terms of her class involved in the research, Andrea believes that this approach is best suited to them:

They love the safe path. They love writing notes from the board, they love making sure they’ve got lots in their folders. They like that safe passage of education…in my mind education is not successful, but in their minds that’s the strategy. Full knowledge, lots of writing, lots of very directed learning. And they want things marked…

Skill are very important to Andrea. She sees the purpose of her teaching to impart to her students skills that will enable them to move out into the world. Learning must always be about how skills and information can be used. Andrea claims she does “very little learning for pure information, always learning for application”, particularly in Geography. Ultimately, Andrea hopes that from her classes students are “going to come out with skills that are really useable, practical, helpful”.
A relaxed atmosphere in the classroom is of paramount importance to Andrea. She wants an environment where the students feel encouraged to express their ideas, and where their creativity can be developed. It is important to her that the students feel stimulated and that they are actively exchanging ideas and thoughts.

I’d like to think that the atmosphere is very comfortable. I’d like the kids to think that it is not going to be dull. I’d like them to buzz. I think that there should be “to-ing and fro-ing”, there should be something happening in there. I’d like them to think that they have a nice time but they get their work done, that they are taught…buzzy because I am going to make an effort to make it interesting.

In creating this type of classroom, Andrea discusses the natural progression to students being able to negotiate their learning with her. As a teacher, she does not see her role as an authoritarian. Rather she expresses the desire to “value individuals and as a teacher to make my students feel that they have rights”. She claims to be open to ideas and negotiation from her students.

**Ben**

Ben’s approach to teaching is very much related to his students and how he perceives their needs. He has been strongly influenced by the professional development he received at his first teaching position in the senior high school. Ben refers many times to a theory called ‘accelerative learning’ which he sees as the cornerstone to his teaching. It involves acknowledging that each student learns in different ways (often related to the five senses, eg. visual, aural, etc) and that in order to reach all students a teacher must use a variety of methods, “You don’t know exactly which way they take it [information] best so you have to make sure that it is given to them in as many forms as possible and they will absorb whatever they absorb with…”.

Ben is obviously influenced by this theory and changes the type of activity the students are doing in class, on average three times a period. For example, the class may do a comprehension exercise, watch a video, and draw a diagram all on the same subject matter. This continuous rotation of different activities is also an attempt by Ben to keep the students focused, particularly those with short attention spans. It serves another purpose as well for Ben, “I have a private goal to make sure that everything is repeated two to three times, but not the same way, to make sure that it reinforces…”.

In discussing his teaching approach, Ben claims he particularly interested in using a “physical” way to learn. He uses examples of how he has his classes stand on desks, go out to the oval and form battle phalanxes, or even as simple an activity as using parts of the body to recreate geographical areas (eg the leg and foot as a representation of Italy). This style of teaching also relates to his belief that it is important to offer “odd, interesting” activities to capture the imagination of the students.

Ben believes that in order to enthuse the students and motivate them, as the teacher, he must display his own enthusiasm for the subject. He wants to inspire the students to research or follow up the subjects on their own initiative, and this can only be done by ensuring that he comes across in the classroom as excited about what he is teaching. He does have a small reward system
(jellybeans) that he implements when he believes a student is making an outstanding effort in class.

Ben argues that it is his role to present a variety of viewpoints to the students. He is very encouraging of questions and discussion. He tries to maintain a friendly and “secure” atmosphere in the classroom which encourages the students to interact. Ben claims he wants the classroom to be “informal” and sees himself as a “facilitator”. In contrast to Andrea, he is not concerned with the students writing, “text contains a lot of information but not a lot of understanding”. He does however believe in using as many varied resources as possible.

**Attitude towards Civics**

**Andrea**

Andrea sees a role for civics, not only her classroom, but across the school experience. Harbour View College has a strong pastoral care system which Andrea views as a clear match for civics. She believes that there are many opportunities for the students to get more involved in the way the school runs. In terms of her class though, Andrea is vehement about the need to view civics from a geographical perspective. She talks all about understanding events and processes in terms of “space”. This is partially a reaction to the splitting of civics between history and geography:

> I want to see that in terms of decisions made about space. I don’t want to see that only in terms of historical events. So I am really concerned about the changes in space. I mean space as in what happens on this area of land, in this ocean, in this air. It has to have a geographical underpinning to what has happened. So if I am going to for example, consider Australia becoming a Republic I don’t want to see that purely as an issue of history, I want to see that, what would that mean for the way our management of our land and our human resources be. So I’ve got to keep trying to bring it back to that perspective.

Andrea, although open to the idea of civics, appears a little apprehensive about teaching it. While she is very confident about her ability as a geography teacher, she has some concerns about how to teach civics. This is partially related to her ideas on the pedagogical approach she should adopt with civics, which has some differences to her usual teaching methods. For example, Andrea believes that group work is natural choice for civics, but is not generally in favour of it. It is also related to Andrea’s uncertainty about what exactly civics is, “I am getting further and further from knowing what it is the more I do!”.

In order for civics to succeed, Andrea believes that it has to be relevant and significant to the student’s lives. She is also interested in the role civics can play in introducing her students to different ideas and “realities”. She is aware that many of them have had a relatively privileged background and feels that they will benefit from more exposure to the community. Andrea thinks that she will have succeeded in teaching civics when it is something that the student’s “talk about over dinner”.

**Ben**

Ben also believes in the need of relevance of civics to the students. While he thinks it is important for example to teach about parliament, he believes that it would be better aimed at
older students, who are closer to participating in the political system through voting. He does however, see a role for civics in providing students with a better understanding of their parents and the outside world. By teaching some basic concepts, Ben hopes that the students will remember and see the relevance as they grow older.

Ben is generally very positive in his attitude towards civics and citizenship education and its inclusion in the school syllabus. He connects the subject strongly with ideas of social justice, which he is very interested in. Ben attributes this interest to being the son of refugees from the Hungarian revolution and gaining an understanding of citizenship and society from that perspective. He believes that civics and education “should be more than simply listing a number of facts down on paper…it should be creating someone who has a knowledge and an interest in being involved in society”.

For Ben, there is a natural link for civics with History and General Studies. His view of History as being about understanding and exploring society and values, is carried over to his perception of what civics is about. He can also see a role for civics and citizenship in Geography, as the “flipside” of History.

This affinity with History and General Studies is one of the reasons that Ben feels very comfortable teaching civics. To him it is merely an extension of what he is already teaching. His comfort with the subject and confidence in his ability to teach it, is also augmented by his previous experience trialing various civics units. His only concern is the need to develop a wide range of “good resources” for teachers to work with.

Reason for Participating in Research

Andrea

The federal government’s Discovering Democracy project was a strong influence on Andrea’s involvement in research. Through some professional development she was undertaking, Andrea became aware of a grants scheme being offered to private schools. According to Andrea, schools could apply for a grant to develop a unit using the Discovering Democracy materials as a springboard for creating units of work. The money from the grant was to be spent on areas such as teacher release days. The developed unit would then be used by the group providing the grants, as a resource for other schools.

The development of the unit for the grant scheme, is one of the reasons why Andrea agreed to participate in the research. It seemed a natural “marriage” to her. However, there appears to be a greater driving force behind her reasons to trial a new civics unit in general. Principally, this is the concern about the imminent introduction of a new area (civics) into her subject domain, and her lack of readiness for it. Andrea is aware that her knowledge and understanding of the role of civics in the classroom is not fully developed. She terms it as still being “on the learning curve” and wants to solidify her own understanding of civics before it becomes a formal part of the curriculum. Had the unit had been related to another subject area, Andrea argues that she would not have agreed to trial it.
As Head teacher, Andrea is also aware of a need to guide the other teachers in her department. She sees it as her responsibility to be able to lead her fellow teachers through the subject and preempt any problems or issues they may have:

And I suppose that one reason why I’m doing this unit and that other people in the department aren’t doing it and I think that’s because I’ve got to try and tag what are the difficulties in applying civics and citizenship to geography. Because I, I in my mind hadn’t got it clear, so if I haven’t got it clear, I can’t expect people within my department to be clear.

On a more personal level, Andrea saw trialling the civics unit as an opportunity to challenge herself in the classroom. As will be discussed in more detail in the next section, Andrea is committed to ensuring she is in touch with new ideas and does not allow her teaching to become staid. By trialling a unit in a new area, she is challenging herself, “Sometimes maybe I get locked into a methodology of geography, civics coming through gives you an opportunity…to use a different approach”.

A need to make Geography “really relevant” was also a motivation for Andrea’s participation in the research. While she finds the subject interesting, she is aware of the challenge of creating that excitement in her students. Geography runs the risk of being too removed from everyday life, and Andrea sees civics as a potential way to address that problem, “I think we have an opportunity to make our subject really relevant, vibrant, contemporary, happening, evolving, something I hope that they talk about over dinner”.

**Ben**

As previously discussed, Ben had already been involved in research into civics and citizenship education. This fact is important for two reasons relating to his willingness to participate in this research. Firstly, unlike Andrea, Ben felt confident and comfortable with teaching the subject, and therefore unfazed by being observed. Secondly, having previously taught civics meant that Ben did not have to create a whole new unit to teach, but could rely on some of the work he had previously done. The combination of these factors made Ben willing to assist in this research. It also meant that he had already dealt with some of the issues that motivated Andrea to become involved, such as concern about being left behind.

Ben also saw participating in the research as an opportunity to expand upon the work he had already invested in civics. In particular, Ben welcomed the opportunity to trial some of the content and teaching strategies he had developed on a different class. In this case it was specifically on a class that contrasted greatly with his previous classes in terms of academic ability. He saw the research as a chance to discover how transferable the unit and his approaches to it were.

**The Two Classes**

**Harbour View College**

The year nine class observed for this research was one of two non-graded geography classes at Harbour View College. There were 22 students in the class, with a new international student joining the class approximately half way through the unit. From Andrea’s evaluations and the
researcher’s observations, there appeared to be a range of academic ability in the class, but a high degree of motivation was a common factor. The personalities of the students in this class was one of the guiding reasons Andrea choose to trial the civics unit with them:

I don’t think that they are incredible bright, I’m not saying that it’s an exceptionally group, but it is an exceptionally organised group, movers and shakers sort of thing. Maybe that’s why I choose this group to do it too, because they are going to give it a go and they like the action, they like organising.

The Station School
As mentioned previously, the class from Station School observed in the research, was considered at the lower end of the academic scale, or a “low ability class”. It was the “bottom” of the three year 10 History classes and many of the students had learning and/or behavioural problems. There is also a small number of ESL students in the class. Ben was aware of these issues, and concentrated on tailoring his teaching to ensure that the students gained the maximum benefit, “I deal with my clientele”.

The Units
Harbour View College
Andrea’s need to combine geography with a sense of relevance for the students, led her to develop a new unit on the usage of a local public land site. She wanted to find a problem that the students had some connection with so she chose a site that they all visited and made use of. She presented the students with the situation (a major change in the usage that would greatly impact the public) and then asked them to research it in groups, using different perspectives, and present their findings at a “public meeting” of parents, students and other teachers.

This unit allowed Andrea to make use of various teaching strategies and activities she felt were applicable to civics. This was particularly, the concept of group work and public presentation. These two activities she saw as an imitation of civic life, where a group will work together to lobby a public meeting on an issue of interest to them. While she was comfortable with, and enthusiastic about the students presenting to the public, she did not have the same level of ease with group work. Andrea was very open in admitting that she preferred to have the class focused around her and was worried that students were not working hard enough without direct supervision. In order to combat this fear, she did undertake a number of her more “standard strategies”, including class discussions, note-copying and using maps. She ensured that the students were always aware of the geographical implications of their research. After completing the unit, and looking at it retrospectively, Andrea decided that she would be willing to use group work again, but would apply more structure to it.

Andrea, in keeping with her vision of civics being approached holistically in the school, involved other teachers and subject areas in the unit. As well as inviting other teachers to the public forum, Andrea enlisted the assistance of the Drama and Computer Studies teachers for the unit. The students practiced their presentation skills under the guidance of the drama teacher and the computer teacher dedicated her lessons to assisting the students with research skills using the Internet and Powerpoint presentation.
The Station School
Ben’s civics unit was based around material he had used in his previous units, combined with some current events. It was essentially about the federation of Australia, but contained content about passing a bill in Parliament, political parties and the referendum on the Republic. The other Year 10 History classes at Station School were doing a similar unit, but Ben had dramatically altered the amount and level of content for his class.

The strategies Ben employed for the unit was resemblent of the teaching approach he discussed as adhering to. Every class contained a variety of activities, ranging from word puzzles, comprehension, diagrams, and using text books through to watching videos, class discussions, and library and internet research. There was some note-copying, but Ben was careful to ensure that the students comprehended what they were writing. This involved breaking down the text and re-writing in their own words, doing crosswords using some of the harder language, and discussing the content.

One of the central activities of the unit was the opportunity for each student to “teach” the class. In groups, they were given an area to research, and then present back to the class. Ben felt that this was the most and the least successful strategy. Each individual student gained a good understanding of the area they presented, but Ben felt that the teaching skills of the students left a lot to be desired. Like Andrea, he would be willing to try the exercise again, but with a tighter structure.

Student Response
One of the common features articulated by the students at both Harbour View College and Station School was that they were unaware that they had been “doing civics” in the unit. They were aware of the name, but could not describe what it was or where it was related to what they had been doing. One of the other commonalities between the two classes was a positive reaction to the teachers enthusiasm in the classroom. At Station School the students were particularly complimentary of Ben’s energetic approach to teaching and thought “he did really well with a boring subject”.

Ben’s students also reported responding well to the variety of activities offered. They all felt comfortable interacting and asking questions, and thought they had benefited from class discussions, They cited copying notes as being the least interesting and involving activity, as did the students at Harbour View. The Station School students were positive however, towards the activity that involved them teaching the class. They felt really empowered by the opportunity. Their biggest complaint was about the lack of relevance of the unit to their lives. While the media coverage of the Republican debate offered some connection, generally they felt that at their age political matters were irrelevant.

Andrea’s students had much more positive experience in terms of relevance. Their own use of the site chosen to research, combined with some media coverage it received, established a strong link. It also achieved Andrea’s aim of providing the students with something they could discuss with their parents at dinner.
The students at Harbour View College found the interaction with the community to be interesting and exciting on two levels. Firstly through their research, talking to local residents, politicians, business owners etc, and secondly, presenting at a public forum. The forum, in a similar way to Station Schools’ teaching the class activity, allowed the students an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and hard work. The students were also enthusiastic in their praise of using other subject areas and teachers in relation to the unit.

The least positive reaction by the students at Harbour View College was to the group work aspect. Mirroring some concerns of Andrea, the students complained about the unfair distribution of work within the groups and the difficulty of working together. However, overall the feeling was very positive towards the unit, and they felt that returning to their “normal” geography units would be hard.

Conclusion
The breadth of this paper has allowed only a glimpse into the area occupied by civics in the classroom. In order to begin to understand what space civics and citizenship will occupy in schools throughout Australia, there are many variables to be considered and questions to be asked. What this paper has hopefully begun to demonstrate is how wide this experience can be. The vast amount of approaches that can be adopted to the role of civics and citizenship education will depend on the unique combination of the school, the teacher involved and the students. Although there can be many common experiences, there must be an understanding that civics can play many roles and occupy a wide range of spaces.