Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to appraise the impact of curriculum frameworks on the introduction and development of civics in the nation's curriculums. Discussion of a civics frameworking project in the context of national initiatives provides an opportunity to examine the relevance and applicability of the endeavour. What informs and drives this project will be examined. The perceptions of teachers about civics and the use of frameworks provides a valuable insight into the practical application of frameworks in the classroom. A national program in civics, Discovering Democracy, will be looked at for its potential relationship with civics frameworks.
Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discover and discuss the relationship between frameworks and civics in our curriculums. Civics is in many ways a recent ‘player’ in our educational landscape and, as such, provides a different perspective from which to view the nature of frameworks at play. In order to gain a better understanding of this relationship, after a discussion on the rise and implementation of civics, this paper will move from the national level, to the particular case of one State, New South Wales. An extra dimension will be pursued with a look into the classroom in order to witness the realities of civics and frameworks in action. Civics is also perhaps an unusual study in frameworks, because it involves so many other interested ‘players’. One of these ‘players’ is the latest government project Discovering Democracy, which is a national initiative that each state and territory has taken on. How this complements or complicates the situation warrants attention.

The Rise of Civics and Citizenship Education

The recent history of civics and citizenship education¹ 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. These reports were not alone in their attempts to have civics education revitalised. Other groups, including the Constitutional Centenary Foundation, were also interested. 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."

¹ Will be referred to as ‘civics’ or ‘civics education’ for the purposes of this paper
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, fate (in the form of the Australian electors) stepped in and the Keating government was replaced by The Howard Coalition government, which froze the funding on the project. This was a temporary measure until an investigation was conducted into the area, and then in 1996 the new Education minister, Dr Kemp, released the plans for *Discovering Democracy*. 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 first stage of the package was distributed in November 1997.

Since then, civics has found a more formal place in the curriculum of the states and territories, although, many would argue with varying degrees of success and acceptance. Civics has certainly not had a quiet entrance. However, as a relatively new ‘player’ in the field, it provides an interesting perspective from which to view the inception and impact of frameworks.

**Frameworks**

Before investigating the relationship between civics and frameworks, it is first necessary to gain an understanding of what is meant by ‘frameworks’. In many ways it seems that the definition of
curriculum frameworks can be gathered only from their stated purpose or usage. That purpose has been stated as to "provide support and guidance for schools involved in planning and reviewing their curriculum" (Education Department of Victoria (EDV) 1985:5). Further terms such as "help", "enhance" and "offer the best advice possible" are often used in relation to explaining the concept of frameworks. Curriculum frameworks can be seen as "documents setting out recommendations to schools on curriculum and teaching". Frameworks are a means of guiding and shaping the curriculum. They are not meant to be a syllabus, or a detailed course. Neither are frameworks intended as a constrictive or compulsory formula. Some frameworks strive to go further than others, setting out recommendations for teaching methods and classroom procedures (EDV), whilst others are viewed as a means to ensure continuity between year levels. Dawkins argued that a curriculum framework should include as a feature criteria for determining content and methods of assessment for achieving curriculum objectives. He concluded that the "framework should provide a guide to the best curriculum design and teaching practices" (Dawkins 1988:4). Of course, whether frameworks achieve these goals, or are even perceived to be attempting to, is another matter.

**National and State Influences on Frameworks**

The interesting relationship between civics and frameworks starts with the dissection of what informs the framework. Where is its genesis, what feeds it, and after its inception and release into the educational arena, who uses it and how? The ground between national and state education bodies sometimes needs to be trod carefully.

Many curriculum initiatives have had their birth at a national level and have a flow-down effect. Although state governments traditionally (and legally) control education, the federal government has had an undeniable influence over many decisions. A united approach by the states and territories towards education in the past decade has helped to strengthen this position. The State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers responsible for education (forming the Australian Education Council) presented a consolidated front, with a commitment to a uniform national approach to education. This relationship has, however, not been without its problems and divisions.

There is a history that has at times seen a "deadlock" ensue over issues of power and control (Kennedy & Print 1994:18). An example of this is the decision by New South Wales in 1995 not to continue with the adoption of the nationally developed statements and profiles for implementation
in their syllabuses (Holt 1997:15). At the opening of a forum on the statements and profiles, in 1996, the New South Wales Minister for Education and Training made the position of his government very clear stating:

We in NSW support a national framework that acknowledges the sovereign right of States and Territories to establish their own educational priorities...[I] regret to say that I have noticed a changing climate in national collaboration in more recent times. NSW will continue to resist any attempt to impose educational goals without proper consultation and negotiation

(Aquilina 1996:1)

The starting point for a framework in civics was undoubtedly at the national level. The commitment to civics started long before the release of the Civics Expert Group report. In fact it was an earlier national document that is thought to have been instrumental in paving the way for that report. The document in question is the 1989 Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia, otherwise known as the Hobart Declaration. The Common and Agreed Goals were the result of a concern that there was lack of direction in Australian education (Print 1997:128). These goals were agreed upon at a meeting of the Australian Education Council (AEC). This document highlighted the agreed commitment to foster active citizenship through the school curriculum. Goals six and seven explicitly state:

Goal 6 To develop in students... capacity to exercise judgement in matters of morality, ethics and social justice.

Goal 7 To develop knowledge, skills, attitude and values which will enable students to participate as active and informed citizens in our democratic Australian society within an international context.

(AEC 1989)

The reaffirmation of this national support of civics occurred in similar circumstances in 1999, with the release of the Adelaide Declaration. This document, which replaced the Hobart Declaration, was the new National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century endorsed by the 10th Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). A part of the Adelaide Declaration noted the need for performance indicators in civics and citizenship
education to be developed (MCEETYA 1999) as well as goal 1.4 which states 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.

(MCEETYA 1999)

The Hobart declaration was part of the first step in the national context towards civics, and the Adelaide declaration cements the commitment to its inclusion in the national education scene. However, as previously mentioned the biggest push on a national level came in the form of the Civics Expert Group. The recommendations of the report were adopted first by the Federal Labor government and then by their succeeding Coalition government (albeit with their own special emphasis). This represented a national drive to see civics included in curriculums Australia-wide. The encouragement for the inclusion of civics in state and territory syllabuses, was helped by a great deal of publicity fuelled by statistics emphasising the ignorance of Australian youth (CEG 1995). By dedicating $17.5 million dollars to the development and launching of the Discovering Democracy project and ensuring that it had a nation-wide distribution, the federal education sector showed its commitment to the uptake of civics by the state and territory education departments.

Another national initiative, which may be seen as also influencing the state of play regarding civics, is the Quality Outcomes program. This Commonwealth program for schools started in 1997 and is a five-year plan monitored by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA). The aim of the programs is to "supports strategic and collaborative initiatives to further the Commonwealth agenda for schools" (DETYA 1999).

The States and Territories were not entirely reluctant partners in the case of civics. "The States and Territories had already given their in-principle support to the Commonwealth's programme. The Commonwealth will now seek their agreement to incorporate civics and citizenship education as a core part of the Key Learning Area of Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE)"(Kemp 1997). Thus the States and Territories, whilst not being bound to national initiatives, such as Discovering Democracy are not blind to the advantages of following a national lead. As well as support documents being developed for them, and ensuring a continuity of syllabus areas across the States and Territories, there is the issue of ensuring a good relationship with the source of large amounts of their funding.
While "policy decisions at both state and federal levels in Australia make it clear that syllabuses in civics and citizenship education will soon be developed and implemented on a wide scale throughout Australia's school systems" (Dunkin et al 1996:1), the level of responsibility for them is split. It is the State and Territory education departments that are responsible for the actual development of curriculum frameworks (although there are frameworks that are specifically designed as national overviews, but these are more general in nature). The impetus for a curriculum framework may come from a national project, but it is up to the State and Territory players to develop it. This is meant to be done in conjunction with already existing syllabuses and curriculum documents.

Frameworks developed by a State or Territory education department are usually a result of a consultative process "ensuring that the guidelines and support are developed with the widest possible consultation" (Curry 1985:4). This process aims to ensure that not only is a wide range of knowledge and skills accessed in the development, but also that there is a sense of ownership by the people who will enact the framework. It also aids in establishing a partnership between the involved parties, which lasts past the development stage. The Education Department of Victoria, in releasing their 1985 curriculum framework project document, stated "(t)he effective use of Curriculum Frameworks will require local, regional and central support" (EDV 1985:5).

The importance of ensuring these groups are represented in curriculum frameworks, and design generally is paramount. It has been argued in relation to civics that this process has not occurred. In acknowledging that there has been a successful history of class and school-based curricula development, Mellor argues that this has not transferred into the approach to civics. Instead, she claims that there is a belief that "education change can be mandated from Head Office...and that the proper role of teachers is to neutrally deliver the given curriculum frameworks" (1996:1-2). Mellor criticises the "top-down" approach adopted by the Curriculum Corporation and various State ministries towards the place of civics in the curriculum. Taking this further Mellor predicts the failure of such curriculum initiatives (including the implementation of Discovering Democracy which will be discussed later in this paper). Using research conducted into the take-up for schools of the CSF (the Victorian version of national curriculum) frameworks, she quotes a Victorian Ministry report that puts the take-up figure at a mere 10% of schools using the documents (1996:2).

Mellor's comments are pertinent in the light of how frameworks are supposed to be implemented on a school level. Once the state or territory responsible for creating them has sent them out, it is
usually at the discretion of the teachers or curriculum writers how they are used. A curriculum framework developed for Tasmania explains "(h)ow schools and colleges incorporate this framework in their curriculum will reflect their circumstances, development plans and the timelines they have in place. The processes used will also vary in different school..." (Department of Education and the Arts 1993:7).

The leaving of the frameworks at the discretion of those developing the curriculum, opens the ways for a vast spectrum of experiences, from the taking up and using of frameworks to the complete overhaul of syllabuses, as well as to the possibility of their never being consulted at all.

The NSW Citizenship Education Framework

One of the ways that New South Wales reacted to the national thrust for inclusion of civics into its syllabuses was by producing the Citizenship Education Framework K-10\(^2\). This was preceded by an announcement in January 1995 by the State Minister for Education in New South Wales that all government schools in the state would teach civics. A forum was held with the Board of Studies and representatives of interested groups. Amongst the outcomes of the forum was a decision to develop a framework.

This framework document developed by the New South Wales Board of Studies first had its genesis in 1996, and underwent a process of consultation including wide distribution and a series of focus groups. However, even in its revised state, the framework was not distributed universally to schools because it was "intended to be a reference for curriculum developers...not a syllabus" (Board of Studies (BOS) 1996). It was influenced in content by the Eltis Review (1995), which argued in favour of an emphasis on “citizenship” as opposed to “civics” education (BOS 1996:5)\(^3\).

The background for the framework was explained in the document as a response to the Civics Expert Group report. It also explained that, in endorsing the document Focus on Learning: Report of the Review of Outcomes and Profiles in NSW Schooling, the NSW Government had directed the

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\(^2\)The second draft is known as the “Citizenship Education Revised Framework K-10”

\(^3\)“Civics education focuses on knowledge about the structure and function of Australia’s system of government, its origins, and the way it can serve the needs of citizens. Citizenship Education encompasses not only this knowledge base but also the skill, values and attitudes necessary for personal competence and responsible participation in Australian society” (BOS 1996:5-6).
Board of Studies to consider and provide advice on the "integration of Citizenship Education into syllabuses" (BOS 1996). The framework could be considered as a tool in that process. Thus there is recognition given to both national and state influences informing its development.

The goals of the document were to establish what "constitutes Citizenship Education for students K-10". It was meant as a reference point for "mapping the nature and extent" of civics within the existing syllabuses produced by the Board of Studies. Tied to this it had a role in providing "advice and direction" for any future revising or developing of relevant syllabuses"(BOS 1996:1).

The framework document traces through what the Board of Studies perceives as the aim of Citizenship Education and claims that this framework "indicates the depth and breadth of these knowledge and understandings" (BOS 1996:2). This is done presumably by the content of the document which concentrates on terms and concepts and focus questions. There is also an admission to the values that underpin the framework.

An intriguing aspect of the NSW Citizenship Education Framework K-10 document is that, despite the consultation that took place, it did not became a finalised policy statement. It was endorsed in November 1996 by the Board of Studies for use in syllabus development, but the framework appears to have been superseded by the inclusion of civics into the new NSW stage four and five History and Geography syllabuses. Advice received from the NSW Board of Studies indicated that when civics become a mandated part of the syllabus the framework was considered redundant. Consequently the implementation of the frameworks did not proceed. Although the NSW Citizenship Education Framework K-10 is still available from the Board of Studies, the syllabuses which include civics are considered to be the key documents.

Teacher Perceptions of Civics and Frameworks: Some initial findings from a NSW Project

"Proof of the pudding is in the eating". If the frameworks are the pudding then the “eating” is the usage in curriculum design. Do curriculum frameworks really come into consideration by teachers when they are designing curriculum and implementing it in the classroom? In the case of the NSW Citizenship Education Framework K-10, it seems to be a case of the framework pudding being left in the pantry! At least this is the impression given by the lack of a final NSW Citizenship Education Framework K-10, combined with information about teacher perceptions currently gained
from a research project involving NSW schools in which the author is presently engaged. Although the research project focuses on the implementation of civics and benchmarks into NSW secondary schools, the material about frameworks uncovered in the course of the research, suggests that the civics framework was an unknown entity.

In choosing not to send every school a copy of the frameworks, the Board of Studies may have made a fundamental error. In an already time-pressed profession, few teachers appear to have taken the opportunity to hunt down a copy of the frameworks document. This could be related also to the fact that the existence of the document may not be widely known (despite assurances from the Board of Studies about the extensiveness of their consultation process). Thus without that knowledge of the existence of a framework, there is a fairly limited possibility of its use to begin with.

Had the NSW Citizenship Education Framework K-10 been more widely distributed and its development officially completed, it is possible that it would have been welcomed by teachers and used in curriculum development. Preliminary results suggest that teachers currently dealing with civics in NSW appear to be searching for material to assist in their curriculum development. One teacher explained the problem thus - “What is said in the syllabus is not enough. I think that you read through the syllabus and think ‘that is what I am trying to achieve’ - but how do I actually do that? And what guidelines? The language there is fabulous on paper, but the application in the classroom is difficult”. A Geography teacher grappling with the formal inclusion of civics in the curriculum, after stating that a framework would be useful, claimed she would use such a document in the “design of the program and in the design of how you might go about teaching it.”

This is not to ignore another aspect of the problem is the debate about whether teachers or curriculum developers do actually use frameworks in general. Mellor's discovery about the Victorian Frameworks and the National Statements and Profiles offers a very telling picture of the situation (1996). Despite a consultation process and literature designed to explain the frameworks to the teachers, a small minority adopted them for use.

The apparently limited life span of the NSW Citizenship Education Framework K-10 means that it is difficult to gauge what impact frameworks has had on civics curriculum in NSW. Due to the seeming lack of formal support (the NSW Board of Studies instead putting this effort into promoting the new History and Geography syllabuses), the framework appears to have died a quiet
death. However, questions can be asked about whether it should still have been followed through as a support to the syllabuses.

**Discovering Democracy**

The lack of support material in the form of frameworks begs the question, what (if anything) are teachers using to assist in their curriculum development? A resource that some teachers may have been using in their curriculum development is the Australian government's Discovering Democracy package. Although not designed as a framework, there is potential for the package to be taken as such by curriculum developers. The amount of publicity and exposure that this package has received as compared to the NSW Citizenship Education Framework K-10, is excessive. Teachers who are left floundering without guidance have within their reach a glossy package that they know is distributed nation-wide and developed by the Curriculum Corporation. There is potential for it to guide the curriculum, despite that not being its identified role.

Kennedy and Print (1994:19) provided an early warning about this problem, commenting that with respect to the implementation of civics education in schools:

> The solution is not to be found in a specially prepared package of curriculum materials for schools as implied in the Prime Minister’s statement (Keating 1994). The history of Australian curriculum is replete with examples of curriculum packages that have failed to make even minimal impact let alone be implement to an institutionalised position. Indeed the easy option for the Australian government would be to devise a curriculum package and then distribute it to Australia's 10,000 schools.

However the easy solution of prepared material was opted for with the development of the Discovering Democracy package. The problem now arises - does Discovering Democracy complement or complicate the development of civics curriculum? By providing every school in Australia with a package, what expectations are produced with respect to its capability? Although it is meant merely as supporting material for the civics curriculum, there is the possibility that without other documents to assist in curriculum development, Discovering Democracy will actually drive the curriculum.
There is also the possibility that the document will be ignored. Without enough support and guidance in developing civics curriculum, materials such as Discovering Democracy that are meant to be integrated into the curriculum, may be literally left on the shelf. The lack of a framework to inspire teachers as to its place in the curriculum may mean that Discovering Democracy will not find its way into classrooms.

On the other hand, there is the possibility that Discovering Democracy may actually benefit civics education in Australia by virtue of the attention it attracts. Resources are currently being poured into researching its progress, with reports such as the Civics and Citizenship Education Practice in Australian Schools (Print & Craven 1998) being undertaken. The results that this research yields in regard to teacher confidence in curriculum design and application, may succeed in drawing the attention of the various State and Territory bodies to areas of need.

**Conclusion**

There can be little doubt at this point that civics education in Australia is still in a state of flux. As a relatively new entity in the education landscape it is at the point where curriculum developers and teachers are struggling with its implementation. The role that frameworks may have in easing this transition appears, in NSW at least, to be an academic one. Despite being a nationally-informed and driven initiative, civics remains a nebulous part of the syllabus without the finalisation of the Citizenship Education Framework K-10 document. In the absence of a framework it remains to be seen what impact Discovering Democracy will have on the area.
Bibliography


