

Comment on Draft Years 3-10 Australian Curriculum: Civics and citizenship by John Gore

Summary

Throughout the document there is repeated emphasis on the contexts of local, national, regional and global, but ultimately the three key focus areas of Government and democracy; Laws and citizens and Citizenship diversity and identity fail to deliver global perspectives. The result is a very inward looking document where civics and citizenship, by emphasis, is law, democratic processes, participation and being tolerant of diversity. The problem is that, for years Australians have been unsure about themselves (their identity) and this document, while at times exploring that identity, does not do so in a global context but focuses on over-viewing Australian law, history and cultural diversity.

Each key focus area is a legitimate study, but the content descriptions for Citizenship, diversity and identity **destine Australia's students to a navel gazing** exercise where they learn to be tolerant of the cultural diversity within the Australian community, but fail to come to terms with the intercultural understanding (despite it being a General capability) needed to make sense of the wider world they are part of.

Comment on the focus area Citizenship, Diversity and Identity

In recent years the educational literature has been full of concepts of citizenship with most well canvassed in, Education for Social Citizenship: Perceptions of Teachers in the USA, Australia, England, Russia and China. edited by W. O. Lee, Jeffrey T. Fouts

The establishment of solid knowledge key focus areas Government and democracy and Laws and citizens is not in question. This material has been, and always will be, the foundation of any civics and citizenship course for schools. The same should be able to be said for the key focus area Citizenship, Diversity and Identity. However, curriculum writers and their managers seem to have adopted the erroneous view that being a citizen is mainly about knowing your own country and being aware of the cultural diversity within it. Where Australia fits in a global community might be considered geography, but not civics and citizenship. Yet without such a focus Australian students are forced into a narrow world view through very Australian lenses and will continue to misunderstand many events in the rest of the world, its peoples and why they are not just like them.

Identification and comment on global citizenship and intercultural understanding in the key focus area Citizenship, Diversity and Identity key illustrates this point.

Year	Content descriptions with focus on global citizenship and intercultural understanding	Comment
3	None	
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▣ listing and comparing the different purposes, beliefs, traditions or forms of identification used by the different groups a person may belong to ● investigating the cultural or religious groups to which Australians of Asian heritage belong 	Australian focused and limited to Asia (does this include Middle East?)

5	None	Could be some opportunities but none prescribed.
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> investigating the experiences of people of Asian heritage who have migrated to Australia and who have taken up Australian citizenship investigating the moral or ethical disposition people may have as a global citizen, such as how they relate to the environment and to others, and the belief that people can make a difference beyond their national borders identifying the obligations people may consider they have as global citizens, such as an obligation to be “active” as a global citizen. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nothing wrong with some focus on Asia but is this where some current and many future immigrants will come from?) Needs to be an emphasis on why people have these views not just the diversity. No discussion of the various concepts of global citizenship which could explain “obligations”.
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifying some values shared by Australians and deciding which ones could also be considered universal values identifying the visible aspects of people’s cultural identity (for example, dress, gestures, traditions/customs, accent/language) and the underlying aspects of their cultural identity (beliefs, attitudes, values) and reflecting what this means for interactions between people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How narrow, inward looking and presumptuous is this? The first examples are surface differences likely to be emphasised by teachers and the second are foundational to understanding difference but are unlikely to be explored in any depth by teachers or given the time they deserve through case studies.
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describing dual citizenship and its implications for identity and belonging investigating how citizens of at least ONE other country from Asia, such as South Korea, Japan, China, Vietnam, Indonesia or India, express their national identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> some case studies are needed to help students understand these issues Why only an Asian focus? - and how can students understand the national identity of these countries to explain the expressions.
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> investigating stories of how Australian citizens’ perspectives on their role in the global community have been influenced by their experiences of living and working in other countries examining virtual and real forms of global 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wow! Unpacking Australian citizens’ perspectives based on experiences in another regional country. Why only

	<p>connectedness and mobility such as ICTs, art and music, travel, trade, language learning, consumerism, employment, student exchange and immigration to assess their impacts on ideas about Australia's national identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discussing the concepts of 'global identity' and 'global citizenship' and their implications for Australian citizens 	<p>Australian perspectives? Will this really help students to understand another country or confirm their prejudices?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What knowledge do student have for this discussion or will it be shared ignorance?
10	None	

In what ways does the focus area achieve the Intercultural understanding capability statement, They come to understand how personal, group and national identities are shaped and the variable and changing nature of culture?

A lack of intercultural understanding means that the curriculum does not say much about current events or provide a scope for their study. How can students make sense of their world? How can students understand the current issues of identity in Egypt with opposing Islamic, secular and Christian communities, or what national identity means in Syria where Sunni Muslims are in conflict with Shia Muslims and other minorities? How do students make sense of the blame game surrounding the death of 23 students from eating a school lunch in India or the killing of aid workers in Pakistan? And what about conflicts and refugees issues in Africa and their implications for Australia?

A civics curriculum with a global perspective that does not incorporate such matters is one that gives lip service to intercultural understanding and keeps its students ignorant of the world that they currently live in and perpetuating the Australian fear of the other which has dogged our history and all too frequently raised its head as racism. As Australians we accept the foreigners we know, who live in our street and play with our children, they are one of us, but all those others out there - well that is another story well reflected in the attitude of many Australians to asylum seekers by boat.

These are questions about identity, who we are as a nation and how we view different concepts of global citizenship. If they are not part of a civics and citizenship curriculum then what is.

The problem of “secular”

The Rationale states that the document recognises that Australia is a secular nation with a multicultural and multi-faith society. In the Year 7 content descriptions is Australia is a secular nation and has been described as a multicultural and multi-faith society.

The document does not define “secular” and it needs to. The Year 7 content description makes a definitive statement that **Australia is a secular nation**” but only acknowledges that it has been described (by some) as a multicultural and multi-faith society. **What does it mean to be a secular nation and isn't it an accurate description that Australia is a multicultural and (increasingly) multi-faith society.**

Some would argue that secular means non-religious and one definition states not connected with religious and spiritual matters (Oxford) However, a wider

investigation finds phrases like having no particular religious affinities, neutral in matters of religion and not being exclusively aligned or against any particular religion.

In NSW, the Education Act 1990 makes a clear definition that secular includes general religious education. It is important that the national curriculum states a definition of secular that includes teaching about religion. Without this, the view of some of the Greens that public education should be non-religious may be reinforced.

With a definition, the statement that Australia is a secular nation can be accepted widely and surely a statement that Australia is a multicultural nation is a well documented statement of the obvious. But the term multi-faith should have the adjective increasingly. Using census figures and removing Christian, no religion and no response only 7.2% of Australians contribute to the concept of multi-faith.

What curriculum writers need to do.

1. Broaden and update the research base.

Australian curriculum writers need to breakout of the Discovering Democracy hangover and curriculum frameworks of the late 1990s and revise the inward looking current document based on concepts of civics and citizenship that date from the early 1990s with the Civics Expert Group. As good as this report was in its day to galvanise action in civics and citizenship education, it is now 20 years old and the world has moved on, but according to this draft, civics and citizenship education in Australia apparently have not. The bibliography accompanying the document is too old and too narrowly focused.

The reading needs to include Multidimensional citizenship as one concept. It needs to look at some wider publications of the last five years in the area of global citizenship to try and get a handle on the various meaning that this **concept might hold and how these can be used to develop Australian students'** understanding of the world and their place in it.

As not every state and territory will teach civics and citizenship as a stand alone subject further consideration could be given to how Victoria is **"internationalising" the implementation of curriculum. (Why is it doing this? What problem is it trying to solve? Is it their answer to a deficient in cultural understanding within their civics and citizenship curriculum?)**

Revisit some of the issues thrown up from the first IRA Civics study that Australia participated in. That Australia did not participate in the second study is failure of Government to take these matters seriously.

Even conservative countries like Singapore are looking to explore changes to primary curriculum to examine the multiple affiliations of its citizens in a global community. But in Australia, this curriculum suggests that we are still **coming to terms with our past and don't seem understand our place in the world or its future.**

2. Embrace intercultural understanding

The document carries an Intercultural Understanding Capability which is not apparent in the content descriptions. Curriculum writers and managers need to see cultural understanding as a foundation for Australians engaging the rest of

the world and not some left wing agenda by do-gooders to subvert treasured curriculum disciplines of history and geography. There is no conflict, both should be embraced and intercultural understanding be a thread to pull it all together.

The essence of intercultural understanding, as compared to cultural understanding, is that we are as others see us. How do others view Australia and Australians? This investigation and analysis might of itself give more clues about our identity than any other inward focus survey of existing opinions within Australia.

Without intercultural understanding Australians will feel alienated from other people, often seeing them as threats and viewing differences as confirming their own cultural superiority. While not all differences are good and issues of ethics, law, religion and behaviour need to be discussed, accepting the right of people to be different does not have to include respecting the differences. Some of the proponents of multiculturalism under the banner of celebrating difference did not appreciate this point and found unexpected opposition to their cause.

Intercultural understanding needs genuine commitment from curriculum writers and managers and content descriptions and not only a hard to pin down general capability.

3. As a minimum rewrite the focus area of Citizenship diversity and identity
Based on 1 above (a revised research base) and using intercultural understanding as a foundation, sketch out a sequence of content for this focus area across Years 3 to 10 that will require students to study other cultures in increasing depth as they explore their own and others diversity and identity within the different concepts of global citizenship

Conclusion

There is much to commend in a Civics and citizenship curriculum for Australian schools but the job has not finished and the focus area of Citizenship diversity and identity needs a rewrite from an expended research base to deliver intercultural understanding.

Kerry Kennedy writing in Citizenship Curriculum in Asia and the Pacific, (Grossman et al 2008) wrote:

Australia can no longer remain isolated - a European outpost with an Asian geography. Future citizens must know themselves and others as well, they must know how and when to take action, and they must know how the institutions of democracy help them in this task.

Kennedy understands the all pervasiveness of intercultural understanding to the decision making of future citizens. Is this an understanding that Australian students will have from this draft curriculum? I think not.