

Re-Discovering Democracy: Putting Action (back) into Active Citizenship and Praxis (back) into Practice

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Abstract:

The paper is part of an international project examining perspectives and perceptions of democracy in education in order to develop a robust and critical democratic education among pre and in-service teachers and Teacher Education Academics. It begins by outlining the concepts of thick and thin democracy and revisits the state of civics and citizenship education (CCE) in Australia. Using the framework suggested by Barber's Strong Democracy and developed by Westheimer, Kahne, Gandin and Apple it critiques the neo-liberal (thin) democratic discourse of contemporary Australian academic research that suggests that the CCE project only requires some augmentation with issues like sustainability and globalisation while ignoring social justice issues. It concludes with a description of what a thick democracy might look like in school education.

Keywords: Democracy in education, critical pedagogy, citizenship, social justice, comparative & international studies, transformational change.

Introduction

It is the duty of all teachers in State schools to foster in the minds of their pupils the sentiment of love of country, respect for its laws, and loyalty to its sovereign. ... It should be impressed upon the pupils that the greatness and stability of the Empire depend upon the production of a fine type of citizen, fit of body, fit of mind, and fit of soul. (Education Department, Victoria, 1905)

National public discussion in Australia about citizenship, democracy and education is over 20 years old beginning with a Senate inquiry precipitated ostensibly by the coming Bi Centenary of White Settlement/Occupation in 1988. This resulted in recommendations for improvement in school curricula, pedagogy and teacher preparation. While the Federal government had no direct responsibility for these issues (as they were constitutionally devolved to the States), it formed a Civic Experts Group that prepared a strategic plan for a national program resulting in the development and implementation of the *Discovering Democracy* (DD) program.

The debate over democracy in education (Lund & Carr, 2008) has been characterized in terms of representative versus participatory democracy, with the former

highlighting electoral processes – *thin democracy* - and the latter focusing on critical engagement and social justice or *thick democracy*¹.

This re-view is part of an international project examining perspectives and perceptions of democracy in education in order to develop a robust and critical democratic education among pre and in-service teachers and teacher education academics. The focus of the project is on how education supports, cultivates and engages in and or with democracy. Building on prior research conducted with a sample of education students in the United States and Canada (Carr, 2007, 2008), the Australian study seeks to understand how pre-service and in-service teachers and education academics in Australia may comprehend and teach about democracy. Attempting to determine the salience of a linkage between education and democracy is important as it may have implications for the conceptualization and delivery of teaching and learning in relation to democracy (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) both in the classroom and in the education academy. The need to critically interrogate and understand the perspectives, experiences and perceptions of teachers in relation to democracy in education informs the context for this study (Carr, 2007, 2008).

Discussions on democracy² often result in platitudinous affirmations that it is naturally desirable, and, as a corollary, anything that is not democratic is considered virtually irrelevant. Kahne and Westheimer (2003) found that schools and teachers largely teach a *thin democracy* which “emphasiz[es] individual character and behaviour [but] obscures the need for collective and often public-sector initiatives” (p. 36). Identifying three competing visions of ‘citizenship’ in practice in schools they suggest that these are “particularly helpful in making sense of the variation: the *personally responsible citizen*; the *participatory citizen*; and the *justice oriented citizen*” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 239 emphasis in original). In

¹ The notion of *thick* and *thin* democracy is borrowed from Gandin and Apple (2002), who build on the seminal work of Benjamin Barber (1984). Barber raises pivotal questions on the saliency of liberal democracy, including the tension between individualism and the rights of all citizens. Others have referred to democratic binaries such as *weak* and *strong* Swift (2002), *passive* and *active* (Criddle, Vidovich, & O’Neill, 2004), *minimalist* and *maximalist* (McLaughlin, 1992)

² According to Crick (2000), democracy is a promiscuous word, archetypically difficult to pin down with as many meanings as there are uses for the term – because of its conceptual complexity this article clearly preserve s the contested nature of the term.

their research, they conclude that each vision of citizenship reflects a relatively distinct set of theoretical and curricular goals. Significantly, they claim that these visions as delivered in programs are not cumulative. The core assumptions behind each of the different perspectives reflect a particular approach to problems and solutions in society: *personally responsible citizen* solve social problems and improve society, by having a good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community. The *participatory citizen* solves social problems and improves society through active participation and leadership within established systems and community structures. Finally, the *justice oriented citizen* solves social problems and improves society by questioning and changing established systems and structures when they reproduce patterns of injustice over time (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003). Carr found in his research with student teachers that “democracy cannot be disconnected from social justice if the object is a thick interpretation, learning for participatory experience and critical engagement on the part of students and teachers” (Carr, 2008, p. 156).

Despite the significant investment of time and money in the *Civics and Citizenship Education 2004–2007 Project* and the *Discovering Democracy 1997–2004 Project* (Curriculum Corporation, 2009) many teachers and educators still have only a superficial conceptualization of what democracy is or should be (Gandin & Apple, 2002).

The material produced by the Curriculum Corporation (CC) in that time was distributed nationally to every school, public and private primary and secondary. Yet the focus of all this material was largely devoted to a *thin democracy*, that is, it focused on processes and systems. The programme was premised on:

The conviction that civics and citizenship education is central to Australian education and the maintenance of a strong and vital citizenship. To be able to participate as active citizens throughout their lives, students need a thorough **knowledge** and **understanding** of Australia’s political heritage, **democratic processes and government**, and **judicial system**. ... Civics and citizenship education also supports the **development of skills, values and attitudes** that are necessary for effective, informed and reflective participation in Australia’s democracy. (Curriculum Corporation, 2009, emphasis added)

The Curriculum Resources for Schools (1998-2004) developed by the CC while designed to support the *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century*, agreed to by all State and Territory education ministers, emphasised educating students to understand their role in Australia's democracy then largely in terms of *thin democracy*.

The National Goals of Education (1999) stated that students, when they leave school, should:

- be active and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia's system of government and civic life (Goal 1.4);
- have the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice, and the capacity to make sense of their world, to think about how things got to be the way they are, to make rational and informed decisions about their own lives, and to accept responsibility for their own actions (Goal 1.3).

Since that time, it is clear that the renewed international and Australian efforts in CCE largely exclude concerns about *thick* democracy and social justice, through lack of agreement around the philosophical and practical applications of education for democracy (Carr, 2008).

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA-CIVED) in 1999 examined the civic knowledge, engagement, and attitudes of 14-year-old students in 28 democratic countries, including Australia. Its results support the notion that both teachers and students not just in Australia understand democracy in *thin* way - that young people believe that good citizenship merely includes the obligation to vote and to obey the law (Morris & Morris, 2000). However, four out of five students did not intend to participate in conventional political activities such as joining a political party, writing letters to newspapers, or being a candidate for a local office (Print, 2000). Nevertheless, students were willing to become engaged in other forms of civic life such as collecting money for a social cause or charity, and they believed it is important for adult citizens to participate in community and environmental groups³.

³ See Asia Pacific Journal of Education, Volume 20 Issue 1 2000 which focused on Civics Education in the region

The IEA-CIVED study also found that schools that model democratic practices in classrooms—by creating an open climate for discussing issues—were the most effective in promoting civic knowledge and engagement among students thereby developing the potential for democracy to be understood in a *thick* way that includes participation and transformation of society (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). However, across countries many students did not experience this type of classroom. A new study by the IEA-CIVED is currently taking place and the report (including regional reports) to be released in June 2010⁴. This will be significant as a benchmark comparison for this proposed research.

The notion of *thin* as opposed to *thick* democracy, conceptualizes the visible tension between the superficial features often associated with teaching about democracy. A focus on civics and citizenship and the fundamental scaffolding which permits people to appropriate the deeper meaning of the term democracy (Gandin & Apple, 2002) so that students know that civic engagement is not necessarily an individual, private endeavour. Kahne and Westheimer (2003) concluded that bolstering efforts to teach the academic disciplines—whether pursued through high-stakes exams or well-crafted curriculum frameworks—is insufficient to further the goals of teaching democracy.

Background to the New Civics

Western educators throughout the twentieth century have been concerned with the preparation of students for responsible participation in a nation's democratic processes. This has at times been a response to such global events as two World Wars and the Cold War. Political concerns has been translated into the development of variously focused curricula and syllabi (e.g., civics, citizenship, and social studies) and into efforts to democratize the teaching-learning process (Garratt & Piper, 2008). However, generally in Australia both compulsory and post-compulsory education have remained particularly authoritarian and centralized (Taylor, 1996).

⁴ Australia is not part of the study this time

The Australian national public discussion about citizenship, democracy and education is over 20 years old beginning with a Senate inquiry precipitated ostensibly by the coming Bi Centenary of White Settlement/Occupation in 1988. This resulted in recommendations for improvement in school curricula, pedagogy and teacher preparation. While the Federal government had no direct responsibility for these issues (as they were constitutionally devolved to the States) it formed a Civic Experts Group that prepared a strategic plan for a national program resulting in the development and implementation of the *Discovering Democracy* project.

This Citizen and Citizenship Education Project (CCE) was similar to parallel efforts in the United Kingdom, the United States and other countries, a national curriculum was prepared and implemented in the late 1990s, along with the production of educational materials and a program of professional development for teachers. The teaching of citizenship was widely supported but the initiative suffered from the divided state jurisdiction over education in Australia.

The CCE project in Australia, like that elsewhere, places a “growing emphasis on the promotion of civic awareness and individuals’ rights and responsibilities embedded in discourses of citizenship” (Garratt& Piper, 2008 p. 486), highlighting the conflicting discourses in approaches to citizenship education (Criddle et al., 2004), which “permeate both policy production and policy practices across all levels” (p. 32) of the DD project. On the one hand there is an emphasis on passive consumption of knowledge about citizenship with a strong historical focus—*thin democracy*—and on the other critical and active participation in change which is labelled as an ‘active citizenship’—*thick democracy*. This confusion is even found at a ministerial level.⁵ Criddle et al. (2004, p. 32) suggest that at the school level the “narrow historical knowledge version” was often contested by individual teachers.

⁵ Commonwealth Minister Kemp at the launch of the *Discovering Democracy* materials noted the decline in the teaching of history in schools and announced a plan to test student knowledge of the 'workings of Australia's governments and democratic foundations' By 2000, the Minister himself asserted in a media release (Kemp, 2000) that in addition to knowledge of Australia's 'democratic tradition', students now needed to be equipped with the skills required to participate as a citizen and, in the same media release, that students should have an 'active and informed part in community life'

Further, despite the narrow or thin objectives for CCE at the Commonwealth government level these were resisted by so-called 'trainers' who were "determined to impress their own agenda ... to encourage critique of government in a more comprehensive 'active citizenship' model" (p. 32) of CCE. According to teachers surveyed, they perceived that the knowledge and activity components were equally important. While CCE in Australia has been largely a *top-down* process, at the macro level it is "doubtful that policy initiators ... achieved what they expected" as a result of teachers "actively interpreting the policy to suit their own needs" (Criddle et al., 2004, p. 33). As a result a counter-resistance occurred at a micro (classroom) level where teachers "pick and choose" and "completely rejected any notion of a prescribed curriculum" (Criddle et al., 2004, p. 35). Despite this resistance, teachers interviewed were still pessimistic that their attempts to imbue a more active component into CCE were efficacious.

The CCE Project has been extensively critiqued by many educators at national conferences of the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) - for example Allard & Johnson, 2002; Forsyth & Tudball, 2002; Knight, 2000; Tudball, 2005 - for its constricted and *thin* scope, and again with the proposed National Curriculum caught up in arguments over the teaching of history (Tudball, 2010). Fundamentally, the heated public and academic debates over the CCE Project reflect arguments about views of the nation's history and culture that for example "were taken up by politicians and worked into new tests of citizenship" (Macintyre & Simpson, 2009, p. 121). Gilbert (1996) commented on the inherent compliant consumer approach policy in the absence of the learner as an engaged change agent, while Pascoe (1996, p. 18) in a more measured critique maintained that CCE should "empower young people with the confidence and competence to engage in public life". Countering and contesting Commonwealth surveillance (Foucault & Sheridan, 1977) clearly CCE has been "filtered, reinterpreted, renegotiated and reconstructed" by all participants involved "disrupting the potential hegemony of the Commonwealth" (Criddle et al., 2004, pp. 37 -38). The lack of respect for and understanding of the teachers' professional identity caused the occasional rejection of the view that they were *technicians* reclaiming an

agentic and activist role as engaged self-developing transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1988). Arguing that education in Australia has been the result of the struggle over how democracy is perceived Reid and Thomson (2003) acknowledge that it has been the *thin* conceptions of citizenship privileging the “aggregation of individual votes ... [that] endorses hierarchy, elite agency and mass passivity” (Seddon, 2004, p. 173) that has been dominant.

Angus argues that during this period the values of democracy and social justice in education “have been displaced ... by managerialist norms ... linked to the presumed needs of business and the economy of the nation” (2009, p. 37). The neo-liberal policy framework resulted in a re-conceptualisation of the nature and purpose of education, where “issues of connectedness between school, community and young people’s lives have been” (Angus, 2009, p. 37) removed from policy and perhaps practice together.

Shields (2003) argues that:

When children feel they belong and find their realities reflected in the curriculum and conversations of schooling, research has demonstrated repeatedly that they are more engaged in learning and that they experience greater school success. Unless all children experience a sense of belonging in our schools, they are being educated in institutions that exclude and marginalize them, that perpetuate inequity and inequality rather than democracy and social justice. (p. 122)

CCE “seems in the eyes of policy-makers to be the instrument by which societies can find a way still to cohere in the face of new challenges” and compensate for “civic deficit” (Davies & Issitt, 2005, p. 393). Davies and Issitt argue that this view promotes a pragmatic conservatism through the assertion of the status quo promoting a form of *thin* democracy that

Reveals a determination to ensure that it is broadly what already exists that will provide the focal point for engagement. Crudely, politicians who operate within traditional political forms are worried that they will not be known or understood. (Davies & Issitt, 2005, p. 394)

A so-called crisis of civic engagement was used to gain support for the nation state under threat from globalisation; where “greater diversity is met by calls for cohesiveness; disengagement is responded to with a call for understanding of how things currently work” (Davies & Issitt, 2005, p. 394). A neo-conservative or neo-liberal agenda was promoted

through the materials produced by the *Discovering Democracy* Project. Significantly it is claimed that the new CCE was used to ensure that “radical intentions are not carried forward” (Kennedy, 1998, p. 394). The rhetoric of active participation found in these programs and in various ministerial statements about CCE are usually “not achieved in the activities that are provided for school students” (Davies & Issitt, 2005, p. 404).

Dejaeghere and Tudball (2007) conclude that most recent assessments of the CCE suggest “further work is required to promote depth and breadth” (p. 41) and propose an alternative to the thin democracy espoused in the neo-liberal CCE. They argue for a compromise(d) pragmatic ‘Critical Citizenship’—as an “expanded conceptualization of citizenship education [that] is being enacted in many schools” that would include investigation of and participation in activities that “support sustainable practices, social justice and underpin the future well being of societies from a local to a global level” (Dejaeghere & Tudball, 2007, p. 44). What in their view, would a maximalist *critical citizenship* look like? They eschew the *minimalist* content led focus on civic knowledge confined to promoting the ‘good’ citizen—which Print (2000) described as “either a direct or implied goal of civic education, [and] was generally seen as one who contributes to society” (p. 16)—to focus on *critical* citizenship. Dejaeghere and Tudball claim they draw from Westheimer and Kahne’s three forms of citizenship (responsible, participatory and justice oriented) to **prepare** and **motivate** students to address social problems—but still they do not see the necessity for students to **act!**⁶ While stating it is necessary for “students and teachers [to be] involved as proactive agents of change” (Dejaeghere & Tudball, 2007, p. 49) this is confined to participation in

Decision making processes, ... [to] critically **analyze** knowledge and what happens when that knowledge is put into practice ... including an **examination** ... of the structures of social injustice. The goal of critical citizenship is to provide the **conditions** for collective social change. (p. 49 emphasis added)

Asserting the importance of student participation in school democratic processes, they suggest these include items like peer support and community service – including

⁶ This is a distortion of Westheimer and Kahne’s thesis which makes it clear that without real action and involvement there can be no thick democracy

“greater participation in school governance ... **developing** students’ **understanding** of critical concepts” (p. 50) the students are to learn about agency without being agentic. As Holdsworth (2000) suggests, gratification delayed is indeed gratification denied. Distorting Westheimer and Kahne’s vision for a *thick democracy*, Dejaeghere and Tudball suggest that strategies for collective social action include the collaborative engagement and mobilization with groups of people around an issue that merely leads to **knowledge** and **awareness** of issues to **examine** structural inequities and the effects of these inequities on individuals’ lives with pedagogical strategies that **aim** to engage young people and teachers in **developing** solutions. Once again we are left with students *play acting* and pretending—developing solutions but not enacting them as Freire’s praxis suggests is necessary (Freire, 1973, 1993, 1998; Freire & Freire, 1997).

Schwille and Amadeo (2002) in their analysis of the IEA-CIVED Civic Education Study (Torney-Purta, Schwille, & Amadeo, 1999) argue that “as long as parts of the political system aspire to foster active, informed and supportive citizens, schools will be considered a possible means to this end” (p. 105). However, they add as a rider “their success in this respect has been mixed” (Schwille & Amadeo, 2002, p. 105).

The Australian analysts of the IEA-CIVED Study (Print, Kennedy, & Hughes, 1999) have become pre-eminent in discussions of the CCE Project publishing multiple papers about both the IEA-CIVED Study and the subsequent DD Project and related CCE in Australia. Significantly in their IEA-CIVED initial study the authors already understand that this is about education **for** and **about** a *thin* democracy “where the teacher provides information and discusses with students in a structured classroom environment” (Print et al., 1999, p. 48) that involve activities but not any **action** component. This raise significant questions such as do students learn about democracy by experiencing democracy, do teachers use democratic pedagogies, are students encouraged to be responsible for their school and wider community (Torney-Purta et al., 1999)? Schwille and Amadeo (2002) conclude that there is little evidence of this ‘radical challenge’ because the issue for schools (and democracy) is they ask, “how much freedom and autonomy can citizens enjoy without

undermining the social order” (Schwille & Amadeo, 2002, p. 117). Their argument however is still about a *thin* democracy that deals with “attitudes, dispositions and behaviour” so that teaching about democracy will “allow debate over controversial issues” (Schwille & Amadeo, 2002, p. 127) so that students are “**learning to become** competent democratic citizens”(Schwille & Amadeo, 2002, p. 125 emphasis added).

In 2003 Print and Coleman repeat that the “primary goal of CE is to **prepare** the next generation of citizens for enlightened political engagement” (Print & Coleman, 2003, p. 130 emphasis added). Parker singularly contends that such political engagement requires the purposeful involvement of students in schools in “contacting public officials ... campaigning ... civil disobedience, boycotts, strikes, rebellions and other forms of direct action” (Parker, 2001, p. 99). Print and Coleman dismiss this suggesting “in practice CCE is considered to be the school based experience for the **preparation** of democratic citizenship” (Print & Coleman, 2003, p. 130 emphasis added). Print, both here and in other articles, repeats that the primary goal of CCE in schools is about the preparation for the real world but never actually suggests that it might be necessary for such education—significantly for students—to actually engage with the real world except for added on ‘practice’ through the informal curriculum⁷. This practice, he suggests is for future participation as adults, in other words this could be seen as *playing* at **pretend** democracy. For Print and Coleman, the “problem of low and declining voter participation by young people” (Print & Coleman, 2003, p. 135) is the key or significant feature of political engagement and the future of democracy (Print, 2007). They argue that CCE in so-called divided societies plays an “apparently passive role through the manipulation” of ‘truth’ within schools which they characterise as “cultural forgetting” where the goal “is to prevent open learning” (p. 141). However they also envisage that the new CCE should “generate cooperation, networking, trust and cohesiveness” (Print & Coleman, 2003, p. 136) that is, **compliance and homogeneity** in Australian schools.

⁷ Students may acquire participatory skills and values as well as knowledge from ... conducting student councils, running school parliaments, raising funds on special days and service learning. (Print & Coleman, 2003, p. 134)

Similarly Kennedy (2003)—writing in the context of global terror post the Bali and Twin Towers incidents—emphasises that if Australia is to protect democracy there is a powerful need to **know** about democracy and that the new CCE has not delivered a “great depth of civic knowledge for many students” (Kennedy, 2003, p. 56) and asks “what, though, should they know” (p. 57)? Focussing on the neo-liberal individual contribution she calls for a “willingness to support those institutions and values that allow individual interests to flourish” (p. 58). Kennedy refers to the need to develop ‘civic capacity’ which ensures that future citizens **know** how to act, but significantly not to act while they are in school, but only in the future. This reflects her support of an active and engaging approach to the teaching of CCE especially when it comes to selecting content for CCE programs. In agreement with Print and Coleman, Kennedy argues that CCE has three objectives—building cohesion, inclusion and trust; tolerance and respect; critical thinking and problem solving—again **compliance and homogeneity** in Australian schools.

Kennedy concludes that CCE while

cannot consist of the passive reception of decontextualised information [i]t must allow students to engage with both the knowledge they are expected to learn, and which is necessary to equip and active citizenry, and with activities that will give them experience with the practice of democracy. (Kennedy, 2003, p. 65)

These authors see that practice in the sense of the ‘add-ons’ of student councils and perhaps open classroom dialogue where students *play* at being democratic.

Mellor and Kennedy (2003) reporting on the 1999 IEA-CIVED Survey that while Australian students expressed commitment to traditional values associated with a democracy they do not participate in “conventional forms of political participation”; activities that they suggest epitomise active citizenship – joining political parties, running for office or writing to newspapers about issues of social concern. Mellor and Kennedy conclude that students are not engaging in the “very political system that guarantees [democratic] values” (Mellor & Kennedy, 2003, p. 535), but that this reluctance is not reproduced “when it comes to participating in broader social movements” (Mellor & Kennedy, 2003, p. 535). They explain this as the result of either the lack of adequate understanding of the “relationship

between the formal political system and their freely expressed democratic values” or as a result of a “sense of alienation because of a perceived lack of self–efficacy” (p. 535). Raising the neo-liberal spectre of future threats to democracy post Bali and Twin Towers they conclude “citizens need to know what is worth protecting from either internal or external forces” (p. 536). In addition, their suggested *panacea* - for students to be engaged in more role-*play* acting “in activities outside their classrooms such as Student Councils” is described elsewhere as extending “the culture of performativity, with a concomitant focus on adult-led prescription, formalised assessment and top-down imposition” (Garratt& Piper, (2008, p. 488). Acknowledging that passive reception of decontextualised information does not work they call for students to engage with “knowledge that they are expected to learn to **equip** an active citizenry, and with activities that will give them the experience with the **practice** of democracy” (p. 537 emphasis added).

Print argues that the challenge to democracy is not from an external or internal enemy but from its own citizens “who have grown distrustful of politicians, sceptical about democratic institutions and disillusioned about how the democratic process functions” (Print, 2007, p. 325). However, he points to the paradox of over 20 years of CCE “as the demand for democratic citizenship grows, youth participation in formal democracy is declining” (Print, 2007, p. 326). He reiterates the importance of “learning **about** participation... developing of political engagement ... to learn **about** democracy, government and citizenship ... to acquire civic **knowledge**, and skills and values” (Print, 2007, p. 336 emphasis added). He concludes that this may “enhance political knowledge and **probably** political engagement” (p. 336) ... [that] “can influence engagement and participation” (p. 337) in the future. Criticising “participatory pedagogy” (p. 338) as weak in schools, Print defines this pedagogy in *thin* terms of “class voting, group inquiry, simulations, fieldwork and co-operative learning” which he also calls “engaged or conversational pedagogy” which he claims has a strong correlation with future civic engagement which he understands is epitomised by casting a vote.

What emerges (again) is a call for students to **learn** about democracy but to not—at least in a serious way—**do** democracy. Giroux (1999) suggests that “there has been a shift

from responsibility for creating democracy of citizens to producing a democracy of consumers” and that

When public education becomes a venue for making a profit, delivering a product, or constructing consuming subjects, education reneges on its responsibilities for creating a democracy of citizens by shifting its focus to producing a democracy of consumers. (Giroux, 2000, p. 173)

Paradoxically schools are claimed to contribute to youth alienation from democracy while introducing programs from outside school to reduce disengagement (Semmens, 1999). Knight (1997) concludes that school may contribute to disengagement from civic society because there is little in school life and experience that encourages students to understand the relevance to their lives of a citizenship curriculum that aims to “enable students to understand the way we govern ourselves and to think of themselves as active students” (Discovering Democracy, 1999).

Of the four themes in DD only one links directly living experience—*Citizens & Public Life*—instead of starting in school with programs of student activism based on school participation in governance and curriculum as recommended in 1916 by Dewey who insisted that democracy be taught through interactive learning experiences involving students in governance, curriculum and inclusive teaching strategies. Semmens (1999) states that “the place to develop understanding about democracy to begin, is the classroom” (p. 17).

The expectations posed by DD of the good citizen were conceived in individualistic terms rather than as a member of a community; as contributing actively to national economic goals. Prior suggests that “DD reflects a conservative neo-liberal proposal for nationwide measurement of student learning outcomes in civic understanding that are increasingly aligned with vocational outcomes” (Prior, 2006, p. 114)

Missing in this debate was a thorough understanding of what is a good citizen – the civics versus citizenship debate can be seen in terms of the struggle between *thin* and *thick* democracy. Producing curriculum materials will not in itself deliver the results expected or intended.

The approach to DD was to produce material without teacher input - the focus was only on civic knowledge which was “ineffective in achieving its own goal in citizenship education programmes of encouraging students in effective participation” (Prior, 2006, p. 125). Teachers were very negative about the attempts by government to influence and impose one view of citizenship because “the culture of their practices and beliefs [was not] taken into account by policy makers” (Prior, 2006, p. 125). Prior concludes that the existence of stand-alone unlinked or de-contextualised one-off programmes did not provide the lasting affects planned for while the schools were accused by students of *not walking the walk* because teachers were not able to model good citizenship in their practices.

Seddon (2004, p. 172) concludes that:

contemporary education policy, practice and politics has become primarily framed within a dominant economic discourse which marginalises and obscures the political purposes of education necessary to the formation and sustainability of a democratic citizenry. The challenge is to re-acknowledge the crucial contribution of political education outcomes in sustaining democracy and to work for a pattern of citizen learning that accommodates necessary learning for work and life-with-risk, and also learning for citizen action that can imagine the democratic ideal, support ethical judgement and protect democratic decision-making.

Thick Democracy - ACTION and Praxis

The previous section has shown that contemporary CCE in Australia “privileges education markets and individual choice at the expense of public and democratic purposes for education ... [and that this] poses a significant threat to Australian democracy” (Reid & Thomson, 2003, p. xi). How then can CCE be “remade to serve the purposes of a just and democratic society” (Seddon, 2004, p. 171)? Countering this requires what Seddon calls a *deliberatively thick* democracy which “assumes ethical and informed citizens who participate as equals in the public sphere” (p. 174).

Thick democracy goes beyond the championing of electoral and legislative processes, rule of law and basic civil rights (Howard & Patten, 2006). It acknowledges the legitimacy of collective citizen and civil action as external to government and business. This is because citizenship now is more inclusive as various social movements contested past forms of domination. It is this commitment to individual **and** collective agency that ensures

inclusiveness. *Thick* democracy envisages a ‘social citizen’—an individual always in relationship with others—capable of reflexive agency (Giddens, 1994) where recognitive justice is more important than the redistributive justice that has contested the neo-liberal retributive discourse (Gale, 2000; Gale & Densmore, 2002; Young, 1990). Paradoxically as Giddens argues, many of the democracy exporting countries are experiencing crises of democracy at home! Active citizenship is based on a “social activist, the doer of public good within the collectivist decision making process” (Seddon, 2004, p. 177) involved in capacity building and community development; in contradistinction to the active citizen of neo-liberalism who is conceived as an entrepreneur and ‘can do achiever’ to benefit the individual. Paradoxically this was highlighted in 1994 by the Citizens Expert Group who argued that ‘civic deficit’ can erode democratic ideals and ultimately threaten democracy itself. While schools are expected to prepare students to live in a diverse democratic societies (Furman & Shields, 2005) school practices remain largely undemocratic (Duignan, 2005). Therefore, what is required is a fostering of public debate, thoughtful critique of existing social and political institutions and a respect for the value of political action “ranging from public service to community action to protest politics” (Howard & Patten, 2006, p. 470). This is the antithesis of the neo-liberalised CCE promoted in Australia which increasingly adopted the narrative of humans as inherently competitive and self-interested and resulted in the mitigation of reflective and reflexive human agency.

What Furman and Shields call ‘deep’ democracy attaches “significant value to such goods as participation, civic friendship, inclusiveness and solidarity (p. 128). Deep or thick democracy, according Furman & Shields (2004), espouses a number of principles that champion individual rights and responsibility within diverse cultural communities in the interests of the common good.

These include:

- (1) respect for the worth and dignity of individuals and their cultural traditions;
- (2) reverence for, and proactive facilitation of, free inquiry and critique;
- (3) recognition of interdependence in working for the common good;
- (4) responsibility of individuals to participate in free and open inquiry; and

- (5) reaffirmation of the necessity for collective choices and actions in the interest of the common good (Furman & Shields, 2005).

Howard and Patten (2006) explain that despite the common rhetoric of active citizenship there are two perceptible trends within the new civics – the *thin* neo-liberal and the *thick(er)* radical democratic trends. They suggest that thick democracy is motivated by egalitarian commitments and “the desire to extend democracy while enhancing the political agency of once marginalised citizens” (p. 459). Being active in this sense means being “socially engaged and committed to collective problems solving at **all** levels of the political community” (Howard & Patten, 2006, p. 460 emphasis added). Politics is more than elections and includes all power structured social relationships. In essence they explain that this requires the ability to “navigate and influence the power-structured social relation that characterize the politics of civil society” (p. 460). Without an equalisation of agency for students, this is not possible.

Thick democracy actively challenges the view that “unregulated markets are by definition realms of freedom that produce equality of opportunity” (Howard & Patten, 2006) with “extensive social and cultural citizenship rights” (p. 461) associated with a politicized empowerment in the social processes that shape society where all are visible and heard despite their social status. Thick democracy then is about “voice, agency, inclusiveness and collective problem solving” that is “rooted in the capacity to see oneself reflected in the cultures of society” (Howard & Patten, 2006, pp. 462-463), and not in the freedom to pursue one’s own individual self-interest. Therefore CCE to be thick it will also be concerned with a recognitive not just redistributive social justice (Gale & Densmore, 2002). Recognitive social justice is incorporated in Westheimer and Kahne’s vision that goes beyond the personally responsible citizen of the critical democracy urged by DeJaeghere and Tudball (2007) to incorporate **both** the participatory and **justice orientated** citizen. Nevertheless, Westheimer and Kahne warn:

While pursuit of both goals may well support development of a more democratic society, it is not clear whether making advances along one dimension will necessarily further progress on the other. Do programs that

support civic participation necessarily promote students' capacities for critical analysis and social change? Conversely, does focusing on social justice provide the foundation for effective and committed civic actors? Or might such programs support the development of armchair activists who have articulate conversations over coffee, without ever acting? (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, pp. 242-243)

Thick democracy is not easily achieved, in society either generally or in schools in particular. As agents of society in which they exist schools rightly can claim they are restricted in what they alone can achieve as the national agendas and budgets are nationally and state controlled.

Conclusions

Schools have traditionally reproduced inequalities and hierarchies. Yet schooling has also expanded economic opportunities for subordinate groups and contributed to the extension of democratic rights. These contradictions lie at the centre of professional identities in education. It is important to understand the attempts by politicians and other dominant interest groups to reconfigure professional education as a non-critical and technical project for what it is; the routinisation and depoliticisation of practices that legitimate and institutionalise dominant beliefs and values; a process that undermines critical thinking both as a democratic and social practice.

The test for teacher educators, teachers and students are to ask questions of rather than to accept neo-liberal received wisdom. The definition of teaching as the uncritical transmission of knowledge begs the question of "what and how knowledge is constituted as a social and political stance towards the truth" (Armstrong, 2006, p. 10).

Armstrong argues that as participation and dissent are central to democratic life then these too should be central to systems that are central to the contestation between a thin and thick democracy. For teachers

these possibilities are revealed through dialogue with our students and in dialogues with the communities of policy and practice with whom we work. We cannot simply be concerned with the accumulation and transmission of knowledge and competencies; it is our duty to interrogate what is meant by knowledge and how it is formed and to understand the limits of competency. As

educators we are engaged in a process of human inquiry that makes us human. (Armstrong, 2006, p. 10)

Since the beginning of the new millennium there has been a large number of academic researchers and also government consultants who have documented the process and progress of the implementation of the new civics and citizenship education project in Australia. Most of these include a detailed history of its background and development – these details are not in dispute and I see no reason to repeat them here. Macintyre and Simpson (2009) significantly however contextualise the CCE project with important discussion of the ‘cooperation to conflict’ seen during empowerment of a neo-liberal nationalistic and xenophobic agenda that used national controversies over asylum seekers, Indigenous Reconciliation and ‘national unity’ to “eschew ... multicultural objectives” becoming “more directly involved in educational policy” (Macintyre & Simpson, 2009, p. 130).

Dobozy (2007) asks is it possible to educate tomorrow’s citizens to create a more democratic society without democratizing education? How authentic is the student experience in exercising democratic decision-making? How are students encouraged to be active citizens of their school? It has been argued that schools and teachers play an important role in preparing individuals for democratic citizenship (K. Kennedy, 2001a, 2001b; Sachs, 2001). Schools and teachers provide one of the first opportunities to introduce children to democratic principles and practices.

But can this be done without facilitating students’ “understanding of the value of social justice” without “education *in and for* democracy” (Dobozy, 2007, p. 116). I have argued here that school students cannot acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills to successfully become agentic citizens in Australia without the simultaneous democratisation of pedagogy, schools and school systems. The role-playing of democracy and pretend parliaments—recommended in the new CCE—means too often that students are involved in decision making on “an abstract and often detached level” (Dobozy, 2007, p. 118). Programs associated with a thin democracy are unable to take the “social organisation of specific schools and the everyday life of individual students into consideration” (p. 118). This requires

change in educational practice to “inspire political empowerment” beyond the implementation of off the shelf products or programs.

Civics related knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for “becoming a competent democratic citizen” (Schwille & Amadeo, 2002, p. 125). Thick democracy has the potential to become the site of struggle for social justice and equity, and not necessarily assimilationism (Taylor, 1996).

The pedagogical framework of neo-liberalism is “fundamentally anti-democratic because it denies legitimacy to educational debate about the form and content of education” (Armstrong, 2006, p. 4). There is no place for thin democracy in either our teaching institutions, whether they be universities or schools. Significantly, the meaning of democracy is changing “as educators ... are participants in its construction but also in its demise” (Armstrong, 2006, p. 6). Because pedagogy is political, we have a choice between a thick democracy that is reflective, critical, participatory, tolerant and non-hierarchical and a thin authoritarian democracy, based on uncritical knowledge, standards and competencies as the measure of the ‘good citizen’. Negotiating differences is not necessarily about reaching agreements but a commitment to recognising that there are many legitimate ways to understand the world. A thick democracy focuses on “how citizens understand themselves as members of a public with an obligation to promote the public good” (Howard & Patten, 2006, p. 472), and the competencies required of civic citizenship that encompasses informed and active citizens participating in political debate and action on equal terms (Reid, 2002). It is incumbent then for education to assume a “deep democratic engagement” (Reid, 2005, p. 292) – a top down imposition of policies designed by teams of experts is incompatible with thick democracy and must be rejected in favour of the active involvement of the least powerful (Reid, 2002).

There have been detailed studies of students' attitudes to democratic values and participation in society⁸ that conclude that while Australian students have a well-developed set of democratic values, they adopt a passive rather than an active style of engaging in conventional citizenship activities. They will participate formally through voting and they will pursue issues where they see some community benefit but they do not see themselves exercising an effective presence in the formal political system (Mellor & Kennedy, 2003). However there has not been any, commensurate such study on their teachers, and significantly on pre-service teachers and their educators. In this light Seddon (2004) asks:

How can education be remade to serve the purposes of a just and democratic society? How can education, in the context of a social order torn between neo-liberal free markets and neo-conservative family values and 'them'-'us' differentiations, develop an ethical citizenry and capable and creative contributors to the common good who will enable and protect civic society in a sustainable way? (p. 171)

While the focus for this paper was Australia, the work is part of a continuing international collaboration comparing and contrasting beliefs of education students, teachers and their educators in Australia, North America, South America, Africa, Asia and Europe. The aim is to foster the development of permanent exchange networks to include contributions from the Global South (Latin America, Africa and Asia) to enable a detailed comparative study of *Established Democracies, Emerging Democracies and New Democracies*. This work is now in progress, both in Australia and internationally as part of the Global Doing Democracy Research Project.

⁸ IEA-CIVED Civic education study 1999 and 2005

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