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Teachers’ ideological discourses and the enactment of citizenship education

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Abstract
This article reports the findings of a small qualitative study of teachers’ ideological discourses on citizenship education in Western Australian schools. In the context of the broader policy debates about citizenship education in Australian schools and the significant financial investment by the Federal Government in curriculum development, research and professional development there is a surprising lack of attention to the way that teachers’ ideological discourses shape their understanding, experience and enactment of citizenship education. The article examines three competing discourses (conforming, reforming and transforming) organised around five emergent themes from the interview data, namely, the role of schooling, student voice, the role of the teacher, curriculum, and decision-making. The article concludes by arguing that if we are going to build a truly democratic society it is essential that teachers move beyond conforming and reforming discourses to rediscover the radical potential of transformatory education.

Introduction
This article reports the findings of a small qualitative study of three primary and two secondary government schools involved in the Discovering Democracy professional development program in Western Australia during 2004. In Western Australia, a total of twenty schools participated in two rounds of action research professional development over a period of approximately 15 months, and received funding to support their work with academic colleagues. On completion of the project, five schools were chosen to be part of this small qualitative study. The choice of schools was based on their different contexts for the enactment of their projects in rural and urban schools, and primary and secondary schools.

As facilitators of the program we were interested in the way teachers understood, experienced and enacted the notion of citizenship in their classrooms and schools. In the context of the broader policy debates about citizenship education in Australian schools since the early 1980s, and the significant financial investment by the Federal Government in curriculum development, research and professional development there is a surprising lack of research on the relationship between teachers’ own personal-professional beliefs and values and classroom practices.
We set out to do a number of things in this article. First, we begin by briefly alluding to our theoretical orientation and how it helps us to understand teachers’ accounts of their practice in regard to citizenship education. Second, we provide a brief historical overview of the development of the Discovering Democracy project and the particular professional development program we were involved in. Third, we draw on MacNaughton’s (2003, p.4) adaptation of the work of the German critical theorist Jurgen Habermas on knowledge interests to describe two dominant ideologies emerging from our conversations with teachers, namely 'conforming' (technical interest) and 'reforming' (practical interest). Further, we suggest that although these two discourses provide, to varying degrees, positive moments and possibilities for personal growth, community service and active citizenship, they are unlikely to challenge the status quo. Finally, we examine the possibilities of an alternative 'transforming' (emancipatory interest) discourse based on the ideals of social justice, equity, compassion and democratic participation (Hattam, 1995, p. 2).

In each of these discourses we examine five emergent themes based on our interview data, these are: (i) the role of schooling; (ii) student voice; (iii) the role of the teacher; (iv) curriculum; and (v) decision-making (see Table 1). While we acknowledge that such typologies can oversimplify the complexity of teachers’ work and daily life we believe that they can serve as a useful heuristic device in unearthing “internally consistent and conceptually distinct” (Kemmis, Cole & Suggett, 1986, p.8) ways of seeing social and educational beliefs and values related to the enactment of curriculum in schools. Before proceeding with this analysis, we shall briefly allude to the key theoretical ideas informing this discussion.

**Ideological discourses**

Of interest to us, is the way socially constructed categories such as citizenship are linked to ways of “talking and reasoning in schools - forms by which we ‘tell the truth’ about ourselves and others - with issues of power and regulation” (Popkewitz, 1997, p.139). To understand the constitutive power of discourse is to recognise the power of language and the ways in which teachers deploy discursive strategies to selectively define what is true (Donald, 1985; Foucault, 1985).

In other words, the curriculum is never value neutral, but represents the dominant or hegemonic values of society at particular historical moments (Cherryholmes, 1985, p.397). An important
aspect of hegemony is that it mystifies and conceals existing power relations thus enabling the ideology of the dominant social groups to be construed as commonsense (Gramsci, 1971). Within this perspective, according to Giroux (1997), ideology refers “to the production, consumption, and representation of ideas and behavior, all of which can either distort or illuminate the nature of reality” (p.75). Cherryholmes (1985) goes on to elaborate the implications:

Consequently, we are imprisoned in unexamined social practices and structures. We are caught in a web of unexamined values that permeate our language. If we avoid considering how our discourse structures our lives and the lives of our students, we become like anonymous, nonautonomous puppets uncritically oppressing others or being oppressed, not out of control, not in control, simply controlled. (p.399)

Drawing on these theoretical insights we are interested in exploring how teachers’ ideological discourses can serve to either reinforce the status quo or transform it. Furthermore, our conversations with teachers in this study confirm Ball’s (1993) view that policy is “not necessarily clear or closed or complete but always open to contestation and change” (p.11). Viewed in this way, teachers have the capacity and ingenuity to (re)shape official ideologies to serve the interests of themselves and their students in more progressive and democratic ways (Apple, 1980). At this point, we want to briefly examine the background to the Discovering Democracy project and the particular professional development program we were involved in.

**Discovering Democracy**

Since the release of the Federal Senate reports *Education for Active Citizenship* (1989) and *Active Citizenship Revisited* (1991) and *Whereas the People: Civics and Citizenship Education* (1994) we have witnessed considerable activity in the areas of policy, research, curriculum and professional development in citizenship education (Print, 1995; Kennedy, 1997; Print, Moroz & Reynolds, 2001). The initial Senate report expressed concern about the crisis of ignorance and participation in the political processes of Australian society. On the 8 May 1997, the Federal Minister for Schools, the Hon David Kemp, launched a national civic and citizenship education program entitled Discovering Democracy, to ensure that all young Australians “have a sound knowledge and
understanding of our system of government”. The stated purpose was to equip students with “knowledge of the history and operations of Australia’s political and legal systems and institutions and of the principles that underpin Australian democracy”.

Despite all of this activity the Erebus Consulting Group report *Evaluation of the Discovering Democracy Program* (1999) concluded that although there was evidence of a number of ‘leading edge’ schools, there was a lack of serious engagement in the majority of Australian schools participating in the project (p.viii). Robison and Parkin (1997) believe the approach was fundamentally flawed because of its over-emphasis on history at the expense of other disciplines; the heavy emphasis on content; the failure to address non-mainstream issues; and its failure to engage students in a meaningful way (pp.16-20; see also Moroz, 2001, pp.127-130). With these shortcomings in mind, we sought through conversations to determine teachers’ particular ways of interpreting and enacting citizenship as an official policy discourse.

**Conforming discourses**

In this section, we want to examine the ideological discourses surrounding a conforming position on citizenship education and the implications for practice. According to MacNaughton (2003), this position is concerned with “finding out about how we can control what happens [which] often leads to knowledge that conforms to existing understandings or practices” (p.4). Essentially, a conforming position holds that there are pre-conceived and often uncontested notions of the learner as the dependent recipient of learning experiences, with the corollary that the teacher is the controller of those learning experiences. This position foregrounds the idea that one of the aims of schooling is to ensure the induction of students into a common culture or set of experiences.

**The role of schooling**

One of the key characteristics of the conforming position is the perception that the role of schooling is about ensuring social reproduction and utility (MacNaughton, 2003). For one of our participants working in a middle class urban school which we will call Middleton Secondary School, the citizenship project was about developing students' pride in and responsibility to the school and the outside community. According to one teacher, the Principal was keen to revitalise the school and increase its profile in the community. Thus the initiative for this project rested
primarily with the Principal who then delegated responsibility for implementation to three Society and Environment teaching staff. As one teacher commented:

*I guess it was a public relations exercise ... because our Principal was quite keen to get something which would ... focus the school, to give the school a focus in the community.* (Teacher)

The project centred around a large Year 9 cohort and was essentially about improving both student and community perceptions of the school as a 'good' place to be, thereby developing the students' pride in the school. The project aimed to assist these students to:

*Recognise that you are part of a community and as a citizen you've got rights and responsibilities ... [to recognise] what things create pride ....* (Teacher)

The ideals of service and social responsibility were incorporated into the citizenship project to develop students' sense of pride in their local community. Interestingly, the school itself was not seen as a part of the community or project. The audience was largely external. From this perspective, the focus was on service and social responsibility rather than a commitment to human rights or political change (Kennedy, 1995; Print, 1997; Walsh & Salvaris, 1998). As a consequence, the emphasis was upon law abiding behaviour, service to the community and the national interest. For this teacher, the boundaries for the reform process and the nature of desired values were clearly identified, demarcated and controlled by the Principal.

**Student Voice**

According to McNaughton (2003), the conforming position is underpinned by a maturationist or behaviourist approach to child development whereby the child is understood to follow particular developmental stages and is perceived to be lacking in sufficient knowledge or experience to contribute to their own learning. At Middleton, the students were required to contact past pupils of the school in order to interview them about their experiences of school life. One teacher commented:
The kids wrote the letters but with guidance from us and we posted them. Yes, we did most of the work ... it was staff driven rather than kid driven. (Teacher)

Later, this teacher mentioned that within the context of working with people in the local community and getting a sense of what the community had to offer, the students had come up with their own ideas about what could be achieved. However, these suggestions were not implemented because they were regarded as 'too problematic'. Issues such as duty of care and administration became barriers to implementation and as a consequence and through no fault of the teachers, students' ideas were marginalised.

The role of the teacher
This position implies that the teacher is the 'knowledgeable expert' rather than a facilitator of student learning or co-researcher (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). This was exemplified at Middleton when teachers involved in the project tended to distribute knowledge in small doses and to defined audiences. Similarly, teachers decided the format and approach that was to be taken by the students in implementing the project.

The kids suggested working with the local primary school on anti-bullying .... Working with elderly citizens and helping them do things, but that's just become too problematic ... On a large scale it's really very difficult to get kids out into the community ... it's a huge exercise. (Teacher)

Hence, the impetus for change was 'from above' and the students, in most cases willingly, in others by compulsion, were co-opted. While this approach offered one solution to the problem of student involvement we argue that the role and place of the key recipients of citizenship education - the students - may be more usefully engaged with a more empowering or transformatory approach.

Curriculum
Typically, teachers spoke about social responsibility as a key element of the citizenship project, rather than notions of analysis, critique or the possibilities of social change (Kincheloe, 2001; Shor, 1992). As McNaughton (2003) claims, the conformist position, here manifested as
promoting civic responsibility, is about the "adaptation of the individual to society, rather than an exploration of the possibilities of student engagement or transformation" (p.125). For instance, when asked about links to the year 9 Society and Environment curriculum, one teacher commented:

_They [the students] had to do it because it was an assessment ... the demands of curriculum are limiting ... particularly as we're getting more and more pressure this year to prepare kids for upper school so they pass their TEE subjects ..._.

(Teacher)

In other words, the pressure of future academic requirements overwhelmed the immediate needs, interests and experience of students. It was assumed that the work students were doing in the community, including interviewing past students' perceptions of the school, were additional rather than integral to the formal competitive academic curriculum (Connell, 1993).

**Decision-Making**

The ways in which key staff at Middleton understood and acknowledged the locus of power and decision-making affected their perceptions of the possibilities of citizenship education. The Middleton project was conceptualised by the Principal and implemented by a small group of teachers. It was not a project that was collaboratively envisaged or implemented as both students and staff were informed of progress, rather than engaged in the decision-making process:

_We used to tell them (other staff) this is what we're doing and this is what's happening. But really there wasn't a lot of scope for involvement from them and to say that they weren't involved wouldn't be really fair because they weren't really required to be involved._ (Teacher)

The teacher later revealed that the amount of work associated with implementation was extremely onerous and she felt a large degree of responsibility for its success. Rather than incorporating others into the project and thereby sharing the load as well as different understandings about
citizenship education, this teacher, like many others in schools, felt that the project’s success rested with her. Ultimately, these kinds of individualist approaches affected the outcome of the project.

At Middleton, the teachers involved in the project assumed a taken-for-granted view about citizenship education. The dominant culture of the school with the support and direction of the Principal as well as the requirements of the funding body, were instrumental in defining the nature, progress and outcomes of the project. In addition, the procedural, technical and duty of care requirements associated with taking students out of the school, overwhelmed the initial aims of the project. Significantly, involvement in the project did not necessarily lead to any alternative conceptualisation of citizenship education in regard to decision-making and ownership. Whilst, considerable energy was invested in ensuring the technical implementation of the project, there was little evidence of problematising the concept of citizenship education or the process of engagement with students and staff. As a consequence, a largely conformist understanding of citizenship evolved at Middleton.

**Reforming discourses**

An emerging theme in this research is the notion of citizenship as a vehicle for social reform. By reform, we refer to the view of schooling as a process by which students can learn to become ‘good citizens’ in the sense that they are self supporting, law abiding and achieve their full potential. Within this view of citizenship, particular values such as morality, individual participation, and the common good are upheld.

Gilbert (2001), in discussing the UK national curriculum (1990), affords us a useful way of thinking about reforming approaches to citizenship education, stating:

> The goals of this program are to promote the social and personal development of students by developing caring attitudes and a desire to participate in events in the world around them … an emphasis on activity learning to provide the opportunity to experience citizenship as well as to learn about it. (p.117)

Drawing on our framework in Table 1 we seek here to illuminate the nature, purpose and processes
of reforming discourses around the five themes emerging from our data. The examples used in this section will be drawn from the conversation held with a teacher located at Peabody District High, a K-10 rural school classified as having low socio-economic status with a strong economic reliance on timber milling. This teacher discussed instances that are helpful in describing what we regard as a reforming approach to citizenship education.

The role of schooling
Using the lens of ‘citizenship as social reform’, the teacher explained the types of activities that would be indicative of a successful citizenship program within his school such as active participation in school and community based projects. The logic behind the citizenship project was that in having rights, citizens also have responsibilities: to others, to society and to themselves. The following interview extract highlights such a view:

... what we’re trying to instill in the students is citizenship, inasmuch as recognising that you are part of a community and as a citizen you’ve got... the usual rights and responsibilities, but in fact everybody can participate at various levels and that’s what’s meant by being active as a citizen. (Teacher)

They (students) need to develop a sense of community in, not only just in the community but in the school as a community and amongst themselves and their friends as well...You need to be caring of others, other people in the community that may not be as well off as themselves or as fortunate as themselves. We do have some younger kids who are actually going to the retirement home and reading to the older people in the retirement homes. (Teacher)

Performing acts of service in the community was also described as a means by which schools advance students’ citizenship knowledge, skills and attitudes:

My focus was to involve the students in their local community and their position in the community...what they could contribute to the community itself... some of the projects that are taking part (sic) like the skate park. (Teacher)
Student voice

Student voice and the role of the teacher are closely related within the reforming approach. In the following quote, it is evident that student voice and active participation are deliberately encouraged by teachers:

It’s amazing what kids will come out with...all of a sudden they are starting to think about things around them...and if they see something they don’t think is right or might be a problem or might be improved in some way that they will bring it up rather than be apathetic about it. (Teacher)

This teacher recognises the value of engaging with students in order to identify and address issues of importance to them, with a view to making the world a better place. As well, there is an emphasis on the personal benefit to students of having a voice. In this case, the teacher discusses how students learn to make formal recommendations to improve the playground equipment:

Teacher: They now realise that if they do have a concern that it can be raised in a public forum and it will be heard and if possible will be acted on and they don’t just come up like they used to, say a year and a half ago, and say ‘I’m not real happy about the playground equipment’ (now, they are) putting a formal recommendation and it’s discussed and it will be taken to the appropriate people... and they can see that it is working.

Interviewer: Have there been occasions where it hasn’t worked?

Teacher: Only with frivolous recommendations.

Although the students have learned how to act and be heard, it is clear from this interaction that the teacher mediates their voice. Acting in the role of facilitator, the teacher decides the value of student recommendations and also determines the audience for them. Under such a regime, student representation and power is typically ‘facilitated’ by the teacher. In short, while citizenship
education may give students a say, it must fit with the values and priorities supported by teachers in the school. We shall return to this theme in the section on decision-making.

The role of the teacher
This teacher also described a lack of interest among other staff when he attempted to implement a range of citizenship projects in his school:

*It was a little bit hard to get others interested in it so I went with it myself...first of all I was a little disappointed that virtually, I was the only one doing it here so there was no one really here to exchange ideas with, collaborate with ...*. (Teacher)

But with time and evidence of student achievement he was able to convince his colleagues about the value of engaging in citizenship education:

*At the moment it is going well, virtually the whole school has become involved.*

(Teacher)

This shift in school wide support is attributed to the teacher’s student-centred approach to active citizenship. The teacher’s role in a reforming approach is best described as that of a facilitator, whereby teachers provide opportunities for students to engage in community service learning. The projects undertaken by students arose initially from the teacher’s personal interest in these types of projects. In this case, the teacher himself was actively involved as a community volunteer. This experience led to an interest in developing projects with students that were of benefit to the community, as he explains:

*Initially my focus was to involve the students in their local community...I expect the kids to be more involved in the community...*. (Teacher)

However, the role of the teacher in the reforming approach also incorporates student voice and in
the above instance the teacher eventually became a facilitator of student ideas, as evident in the skate park project. Examples of facilitation include the teacher arranging for student visits to existing parks in the region, assisting them with fundraising and generally supporting the students attempts to realise their idea. This approach supported the teacher’s goal of having students involved in the community whilst also adopting a responsive stance to student ideas about what that service might be. This approach values student voice, responds to it and since students are active in the process it is seen to be more motivating.

This approach differs significantly from the conforming position where student voice is marginal, the teacher drives the community work and the nature of service is pre-determined. Instead, the student-centred focus of the reforming approach is illustrated clearly in the skate park project where student input was used in a project that had direct benefit for the students involved, as well as the community.

Curriculum

Focusing on curriculum connected to local community issues is at the heart of the reforming approach to citizenship education at Peabody. Content is developed by engaging with students’ interests and by careful use of constructivist approaches to knowledge. As well, the teacher endeavours to integrate across the curriculum as illustrated in the following example:

*Some of the problems that did come up in the class meetings were litter, recycling...in science now what they are doing is looking at different recycling projects ....* (Teacher)

This teacher highlights some of the ways in which students can drive curriculum content by making connections with their community. This reforming approach to curriculum is encapsulated in the phrase ‘think global...act local’ whereby students had an opportunity to engage in local solutions to the problems they identified. Students were engaged in a process of learning content for a tangible purpose and were motivated to see the difference they could make at a local level. At Peabody, local tension existed in regard to the environmental and economic viability of the
timber town. The interviewer asked the teacher whether he discussed the issue of forest degradation as a curriculum issue. The teacher’s response indicates that the topic was a ‘hot potato’ and that conflict regarding such issues was best resolved through practicing tolerance and mutual respect. He stated:

Initially there was a little bit of a problem where you would have some students calling others greenies or whatever and there would be a bit of friction about the place but I think that because they have seen that everyone does have the right of an opinion and a voice, that I haven’t seen that for quite some time. (Teacher)

Student concerns regarding environmental degradation and pollution were not debated nor did they engage in critical dialogue or political activism. We would argue that such a position endorses a ‘safe’ curriculum in which students can learn about but not critique issues of political significance in their communities (Cherryholmes 1985, p. 399).

Decision-making
Participation in school-based decision-making through a Student Representative Council was one way in which reforming discourses were manifest throughout the project. Examples of student voice related to issues such as improved playground equipment, clean up projects and changes to school uniform and routines. Peabody teachers spoke about developing reforms to school systems to enhance the flow of information between students and school administration. In particular, the introduction of class meetings was a popular example of how students were invited to participate in school decision-making. For example:

There are class meetings and class representatives and we hold meetings on a regular basis if there are items on the agenda... when the issues are voted on and there has been some sort of recommendation, we vote on them and these are taken to the student council, admin or the school council, depending on who it is relevant to. (Teacher)

The teacher goes on to give an example of how this process allowed students to rectify a long-term problem with the traffic flow in the school car park. One student made a suggestion for alleviating
this problem at a class meeting, it was approved at the School Council and the implementation was a huge success. The teacher commented “hang on a sec, we’ve been doing this for years and the kids have all of a sudden come up with an answer!”

Clearly, students at Peabody were not expected to be competent to make such decisions, hence they had not previously been consulted. However, the implementation of a school wide system of class meetings facilitated decision-making processes in which student voices could be heard. This was a powerful mechanism in changing both the perception of student competence and for resolving issues within the school. Such a mechanism was carefully set up in the school to reflect the representative political system of governance in Western Australia. Preferential voting was introduced within the class meeting structure to ensure that students were actively involved in decision-making.

Like conforming discourses, the mechanism used in this approach was decided and sanctioned by the school administration. Students were introduced to a means of representative decision-making and their voice was formally expressed through school structures. Power in this system, resides within the school administration and, to reiterate the previous discussion of student voice, the reforming position provides students with opportunities to work democratically within a particular sphere of influence, determined and administered by the teachers and the school.

**Transforming discourses**

Given the dominance of both the conforming and reforming ideological discourses in our conversations with teachers so far, we should hardly be surprised by the silence around the discourse of social transformation. According to McNaughton (2003), the transforming position is founded on the belief that education can “transform the possibilities for individuals and groups of which they are a part and transform society to create greater social justice and equity” (p.188).

As Fien (1994) points out, “Planning a political education curriculum to foster participation in ‘personal politics’ and ‘community politics’ is a fundamentally different task from planning a curriculum to promote participation in ‘party politics’ and ‘representative democracy’” (cited in *Active citizenship revisited*, p.5). Carr (1991) too, contends that a moral approach to citizenship is
not so much concerned with institutional politics, but the political expression of the values of self-fulfilment, self-determination and equality. In his view, democracy is moral to the extent that it prescribes principles for evaluating social relationships, political institutions and cultural practices of societies founded on democratic values and ideals. Goodman (1991) encapsulates these sentiments in the notion of critical democracy:

As a form of associative living, critical democracy implies a significant expansion of participation within both public and private realms of society. Critical democracy also implies a moral commitment to promote values of economic and social justice and actively inhibit sexism, racism, classism, ethnocentrism and other forms of oppression. (p.41)

Down (2004) explains how critical democratic conceptions of citizenship education attempt to problematise the social and economic structures of society with a view to changing it (Freire, 1970; Kincheloe, 2001; Hursh & Ross, 2000; McLaren, 1997). According to Beyer (1998), “the emphasis on critiquing current realities, on participating in the recreation of our worlds, is a central part of a progressive understanding of democracy” (p.257). From this position, the emphasis is upon “the practice of possibility as it may be aided by rediscovering the radical-progressive potential of democratic ideals and values, and democratic participation, in schooling and curriculum” (p.257). In this section, we want to elaborate some of the features and potential of a transforming position and the implications for thinking and acting about citizenship education in classrooms and schools.

The role of schooling
Giroux and Simon (1998) argue that the discourse of pedagogy attempts to influence the production of identities within a particular set of social relations. Pedagogy is a practice through which people acquire a certain “moral character” (p.12). According to them, it organises:

… a view of how a teacher’s work within an institutional context specifies a particular version of what knowledge is of most worth, in what direction we should desire, what it means to know something, and how we might construct representations of ourselves, others, and our physical and social environment … It
is in this sense that to propose a pedagogy is to construct a political vision. (p.12)

Of the participating teachers in this study, only those in a small metropolitan alternative primary school of approximately 100 students known here as Seaside Primary School, attempted to engage with a more socially critical conception of citizenship education. As one teacher put it “Ours ... is an intentional community ... we want to challenge the status quo...”. Teachers in this school were proactive in connecting to their community where parents had a strong sense of social justice and social action including local protests, leaflet dropping, and volunteer environmental programs. Students themselves were often involved in parent inspired actions such as making friendship bands for refugee detainees, organising camps and fun days based on the values of respect, rights, social responsibilities and negotiation between parents, staff and students. There was a strong connection between parents and the school’s ethos of care, respect and social responsibility for each other (Smyth & McInerney, 2007).

Student voice

Teachers at Seaside were committed to finding ways of engaging students in more authentic experiences. Teachers talked about the “right to have a voice”, “having a voice at all levels” and “practicing democracy in the classroom”. The school’s particular citizenship project involved an audit of democratic processes in the school with a view to “refining classroom and whole school processes to ensure kids do have a voice”.

Drawing on Fine (1987), this means giving voice to students’ own concerns using history, political science and other social sciences to make sense of their own lives. McLaren (1997) explains:

In sum, what a critical pedagogy of language and experience attempts to do is to provide students with “counter-discourses” or “resistant subject positions” - in short, with a new language of analysis - through which they can assume a critical distance from their familiar subject positions in order to engage in a cultural praxis better designed to further the project of social transformation. (p.37)

The role of the teacher
Ladson-Billings (2000) argues that the dilemma facing transformatory pedagogy is how to get teachers “who have been educated in and inducted into patterns of tradition and hierarchy - that reproduce inequality - to teach in critical, emancipatory ways” (p.151). In this case teachers were willing to acknowledge and incorporate local community politics into their classrooms. One teacher observes that:

*Our parents are fairly responsive and proactive in things like who demonstrates, demonstrations we might have gone to and have seen parents and children there too ... a number of them are actively involved in the anti-nuclear warships and stuff. So the kids are influenced by that stuff that parents are involved in ... but what I really like is that the teachers will pick that up and work with it and stretch it further.*

(Teacher)

Not only were teachers willing to engage with controversial local issues, but they were prepared to link their work to wider debates about children’s rights, peace studies, and conflict resolution. One teacher spoke about her efforts to respect these values in regard to classroom management:

*When there is an argument I don’t give out the consequences ... I will stop a whole lesson and we will all come together and say well look this is what’s going on and how it makes everyone else feel ... the kids will discuss what is appropriate.*

(Teacher)

In short, teachers demonstrated a willingness to reconceptualise their role both individually and collectively around an alternative set of principles and values grounded in the principles of democratic schooling (Apple & Beane, 1999; Beane, 2005). One teacher described these shared values as “empathy, support of each other, encouragement, a sensitivity to others needs, giving others the right to be themselves as well, accepting differences”.

**Curriculum**

Teachers at Seaside worked towards a negotiated curriculum with “*lots of opportunities to say what they [students] would like to do and how they would like to do it, what helps them to learn*”.
Another teacher commented on the whole school planning format designed to engage the kids by giving them “a connection, usually an emotional connection that hooked into their learning”. One teacher grappled with this idea in her own practice:

... we did touch on children’s rights and then just moved into what is happening with the refugees in detention and the kids in detention and then they made friendship bands and sent them off to one of the detention centres so they were physically involved with something that related .... (Teacher)

Parents also played an integral part in curriculum construction. Teachers described a parent register of skills and knowledge including activities such as movie making, cooking, art and community work involving restorative justice and an alternative prison remand program. As Connell (1994) points out, “the curriculum empowers and disempowers, authorizes and de-authorises, recognizes and mis-recognises different social groups and their knowledge and identities” (p.140). In contrast to the conforming and reforming discourses these teachers appear to have a stronger sense of the social and political nature of the school curriculum.

**Decision-making**

Teachers at Seaside clearly shared a common commitment to a broader social and political vision of citizenship education founded on the principles of social justice, social responsibility and student voice in decision-making.

These principles informed the relational aspects of school life where student involvement in decision-making was a key element of school culture:

... the kids come together as a group and talk things through and do all that but can we change the world, no we can’t but we can commit to go off now and play in the playground peacefully with each other and to try and resolve the conflict that we have in a manner that will serve us and the rest of the community realm. (Teacher)

Student involvement in decision-making was apparent in the planning of the whole school camp
where they decided on purpose, activities, and outcomes. Teachers spoke about the camp as a “community building” experience where all participants have a say. As one teacher explains “people tried to maintain that sense of responsibility and group ownership of what’s going on”. The same teacher reflected on the differences noted by students between this and other schools in which she had taught:

*Children from other schools ... notice a huge difference. Sometimes it’s quite difficult for them because our classrooms are very outspoken and noisy, but they soon think this is much better than my old school, I can be myself.* (Teacher)

In conclusion, Shor (1992) believes that a participatory pedagogy of this kind sends “a hopeful message to students about their present and future; it encourages their achievement by encouraging their aspirations. They are treated as responsible, capable human beings who should expect to do a lot and do it well …”(p.21).

**Conclusion**

We now draw together some of our early theorising and conclusions from this preliminary study. Based on our conversations with teachers, there are a number of emerging themes and issues to consider in regard to the nature, purpose and processes of citizenship education in schools. We argue that one of the reasons why teachers’ ideological discourses emphasised conforming and/or reforming positions was due largely to the *Discovering Democracy* materials themselves. The *Discovering Democracy* program was primarily concerned with the teaching of content and provision of relevant resources rather than any effort to problematise the idea of citizenship (Robison & Parkin, 1997). We found that with the exception of a small group of teachers at Seaside Primary School, there was a general reluctance to engage with the principles and values of the transforming position. As a consequence, the way teachers think and act in the classroom remains focused on relatively ‘safe’ approaches that serve to reinforce the status quo.

For this reason, we believe it is important to provide teachers with the necessary support and resources to investigate their own personal-practical theories in regard to social constructs such as citizenship education. We contend that there is much to be gained by exploring some alternative
orientations to citizenship education in order to better understand its moral, ethical and political dimensions (Giroux, 1988). This involves investigating “why things are the way they are, how they got that way, and what set of conditions are supporting the processes that maintain them” (Simon, 1988, p.2).

Finally, this study suggests that citizenship education is typically received and delivered by teachers as a fact or skill rather than as a concept or ideological effect. As a consequence, citizenship programs ultimately serve the status quo by encouraging participation in the established social order rather than considering 'what might be'. If we are going to build a truly democratic society, we argue that alternative visions and practices based on the kinds of transformatory principles, values and interests adopted at Seaside Primary offer some ways forward. Investigating ‘close up’ the lived reality of teachers’ ideological discourses in schools and classrooms as identified in this article will hopefully provide a starting point for this broader debate.
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References


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