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# Civics and Citizenship Education in New Zealand

## A CASE FOR CHANGE?

### Introduction

The 2013 Constitutional Advisory Panel recommendation for a national strategy for civics and citizenship education in schools, kura (Māori-medium schools) and communities provided the opportunity for an important conversation about building civic knowledge in Aotearoa New Zealand (Constitutional Advisory Panel, 2013, p.8). This article explores possible next steps for implementing this recommendation. It is broken up into two parts: a case for change, and potential next steps.

### A case for change

This article explores both civics and citizenship education (collectively referred to as CCE). Civics education addresses the formal institutions and processes of civic life, such as voting in elections, while citizenship education addresses how people participate in society and how

citizens interact with communities and societies. Knowledge and understanding of both civics and citizenship concepts constitutes broader 'civic knowledge' (Bolstad, 2012, p.7).

CCE is discussed here with a view to improving civic engagement in New Zealand. Civic engagement describes 'how

an active citizen participates in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future' (Adler and Goggin, 2005, p.241). This includes voting, as well as broader activities such as donating to charity. Civic engagement is a fundamental part of building and maintaining strong democracies (Blakeley, 2016, pp.99-10).

There is substantial international evidence that democratic polities enjoy better economic and social outcomes, leading to overall higher levels of well-being (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). If we accept this and also accept that New Zealand is a well-functioning democracy worth preserving (see World Bank, 2016), then there are three current trends that, unless attended to, will undermine the quality of our democracy. This section builds on these trends with an outline of existing research about CCE and the current conditions for CCE in New Zealand.

### *Loss of a common platform for public discourse*

Traditional forms of 'slow' media, such as high-quality, investigative, public interest journalism, are subject to declining profitability and funding restrictions. This has prompted a shift in the market towards digital communication through

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channels such as social media, which offer greater potential for the generation of advertising revenue (Armitage, 2016) and favour immediacy and entertainment value (Drok and Hermans, 2016, pp.539-41). Despite response to these pressures, such as the online transformation of public broadcaster Radio New Zealand and its recent increase in public funding through New Zealand on Air, the decline of slow media remains an issue for citizens seeking to stay informed (Pullar-Strecker, 2017; Radio New Zealand, 2013).

These problems are exacerbated by an increase in the diversity of channels for news on the internet, making it difficult to identify quality information. While this diversity may be positive overall, it represents another aspect of the shift away from professional journalism (Gault and Kriebel, 2016, p.35). Additionally, increasing diversity has caused a burgeoning of 'fake news': false and misleading news stories that can be shared widely online (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017, pp.1-3). A recent survey by the Pew Research Center found that 64% of US adults say fake news causes a great deal of confusion about the basic facts of current issues and events (Barthel, Mitchell and Holcomb, 2016).

The growing reliance of citizens on social media for news is also causing issues such as online 'filter bubbles'. Because social media platforms such as Facebook determine what content users see based on their connections and which pages they already interact with, individual news feeds can become an echo chamber, reinforcing personal biases (El-Bermawy, 2016). This does not bode well for civility, which centres on seeing your opponent as a fellow citizen, rather than the 'other' or enemy, and emphasises respectful, balanced and constructive public discourse and debate (Rashbrooke, 2017).

#### *Lack of knowledge about and interest in how democracy works*

The 2008 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) revealed that New Zealand has some of the highest and lowest scores internationally for civic knowledge. No other country in the study had such a wide distribution (Lang, 2010, p.6). At the bottom end, Māori

and Pasifika males had the most limited knowledge of democracy (ibid., p.9). This indicates that a 'civic empowerment gap' exists (see Levinson, 2012, pp.32-3), which appears to mirror the other inequalities in our society (see Marriott and Sim, 2014, pp.26-7; Rashbrooke, 2013, pp.1-6). The ICCS study found no clear pattern of association between students' average knowledge scores and their level of interest in social and political issues, nor their intentions for future civic action (Hipkins and Satherley, 2012, p.31). These results point to a need for something other than content or more 'academic' civic knowledge in the New Zealand curriculum to encourage interest and participation.

2014/15 (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2016, p.iv). This growing diversity enriches New Zealand (Gault and Kriebel, 2016, p.34), but almost 60% of recent migrants did not vote in the 2011 general election (Statistics New Zealand, 2014, p.9). As many migrants come from countries with weak democracies (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016), it is important that knowledge barriers to engagement are reduced and that individuals are supported to access the civic institutions and exercise the rights they are entitled to as members of New Zealand society (Palmer and Butler, 2016, p.12). However, it must be noted that a limitation of 'citizenship' terminology is that it may foster an

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Although evidence suggests that youth are more engaged than we think, this engagement is occurring externally to conventional forms of participation such as voting, instead focusing on activities like volunteering (Wood, 2017). The last three general elections have seen falling electoral enrolment rates in age groups between 18 and 39, despite enrolment technically being compulsory in New Zealand (Electoral Commission, 2015, p.45; New Zealand Government, 2017). Further, Māori and Pasifika voters have consistently lower turnout rates than Pākehā (Statistics New Zealand, 2014, p.9). CCE could provide opportunities for addressing these issues by demystifying the enrolment and voting process, and perhaps even helping eligible students to enrol.

New Zealand is becoming increasingly diverse, but the high rate of non-voting among migrants could indicate possible issues for civic engagement. In 2015/16 resident visa approvals were up 21% from

assumption that only citizens can vote, when permanent residents are also eligible to enrol and vote in New Zealand (Electoral Commission, 2016). This must be kept in mind when discussing CCE to avoid perpetuating such ideas.

#### *Inconsistency in what constitutes CCE*

Teachers have significant discretion over how they teach under the New Zealand Curriculum and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa, which are based on learning areas, principles and values (Ministry of Education, 2007, pp.7, 37). The flexibility of the New Zealand Curriculum appears to be advantageous but can be challenging in the case of CCE. The problem is that there is no consistency about what constitutes CCE; nor is there any explicit requirement that CCE be taught (Harris, 2017, p.246). This approach disadvantages students who are not taught CCE or who are taught less comprehensive CCE (ibid., pp.246-50). Given that the low civic knowledge scores in the ICCS study were

found to have a strong association with poorer socio-economic backgrounds, CCE becomes one way to equip all students with the knowledge and skills they need to empower themselves (Lang, 2010, p.10).

In addition, the quality and accessibility of resources available to support CCE requires attention. The recent Ministry for Culture and Heritage's citizenship education resources survey evaluated the current state of resources and used criteria drawn from the outcomes of Aitken and Sinnema's Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) in social sciences, which examined effective pedagogy in social sciences, to assess the quality of a sample of these resources

which CCE is taught is important (Wood and Milligan, 2016, p.70). For example, in a 2008 study of 52 high schools in Chicago, Kahne and Sporte found that 'active citizenship' approaches were most successful in leading to increased civic engagement. Active citizenship approaches link learning to real-world contexts, for example, by following current events and allowing students to study and think critically about social issues that matter to them (Kahne and Sporte, 2008, pp.738, 745-56; Wood and Milligan, 2016, p.70). Other research shows that the effects of CCE in community education for adults are similar to the effects on school students (Finkel, 2014, pp.170, 178; Gastil, 2004, pp.325-6).

explicit references to 'citizenship': for example, notions of citizenship are a key part of the 'future focus' principle (Harris, 2017, p.247; Ministry of Education, 2007, pp.10, 12). Furthermore, CCE could help to fulfil three of the five overall key competencies of the curriculum: thinking, relating to others, and participating and contributing (Ministry of Education, 2007, pp.12-13).

Social studies presents as the existing subject most compatible with notions of CCE (Wood and Milligan, 2016, p.66). Social studies teachers from secondary schools across the country are already working together to form ideas for how to implement the NCEA 'personal social action' achievement standards for social studies in a way that can address the gaps in CCE in the curriculum. These achievement standards were introduced in 2013 and encourage students in years 11-13 to take social action on an issue of their choice, providing an opportunity for active citizenship learning (Massey University, 2016).

Personal social action approaches to date include a teacher who took students to Wellington to learn about the way Parliament works and a teacher whose class visited the Beehive to make a submission at the select committee hearing on the Healthy Homes Guarantee Bill (ibid).<sup>1</sup> A recent study by Wood et al. on the implementation of these standards found that, when students were well supported and were tackling personally significant issues, the standards were valuable for learning about society and social issues, as well as for developing civic and community engagement skills (Wood et al., 2017, p.16).

Tikanga ā-iwi, the subject parallel to social studies in kura, also appears to be compatible with CCE, with the subtext of tikanga ā-iwi being a strong emphasis on the realisation of rangatiratanga through active citizenship (Dale, 2016, p.27). However, it should be noted that Māori conceptions of citizenship are inherently different from Western perspectives. Consequently, CCE resources and strategies developed for tikanga ā-iwi must align with the specific vision of tikanga ā-iwi (ibid., pp.20-7).

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(Aitken and Sinnema, 2008; Tallon, 2016, p.3). The criteria are grouped into five overarching categories of social sciences outcomes pertaining to: students' knowledge and understanding of concepts; students' skills in using social sciences methods and techniques; students' ability to participate, contribute and engage in dialogue; students' awareness of personal, cultural and layered identities; and students' dispositions and emotional responses to learning (Aitken and Sinnema, 2008, p.37). It was found that although there are many resources available for civics and citizenship education, they can be difficult to locate, lack coherence and are of varying quality (Tallon, 2016, p.16).

### Existing research

Existing research also supports the case for change in CCE in New Zealand (see Harcourt, Milligan and Wood, 2016; Mutch, 2013; Wood and Mulligan, 2016). The evidence indicates that the way in

International evidence also indicates that CCE can address gaps in knowledge inequalities. In a 2016 study looking at the United States and Belgium, Neundorf, Niemi and Smets found that civic education can have compensation effects for missing parental 'political socialization' (p.947). Schools were found to be able to compensate for the 'civic empowerment gap' between young people from privileged backgrounds who were more likely to have access to academic resources, political news and the public sphere generally, and those from impoverished backgrounds (Levinson, 2012, pp.32-3; Neundorf, Niemi and Smets, 2016, p.922). The ICCS study cited earlier also provides evidence to support this finding (Schulz et al., 2010, p.258).

### CCE and the New Zealand Curriculum

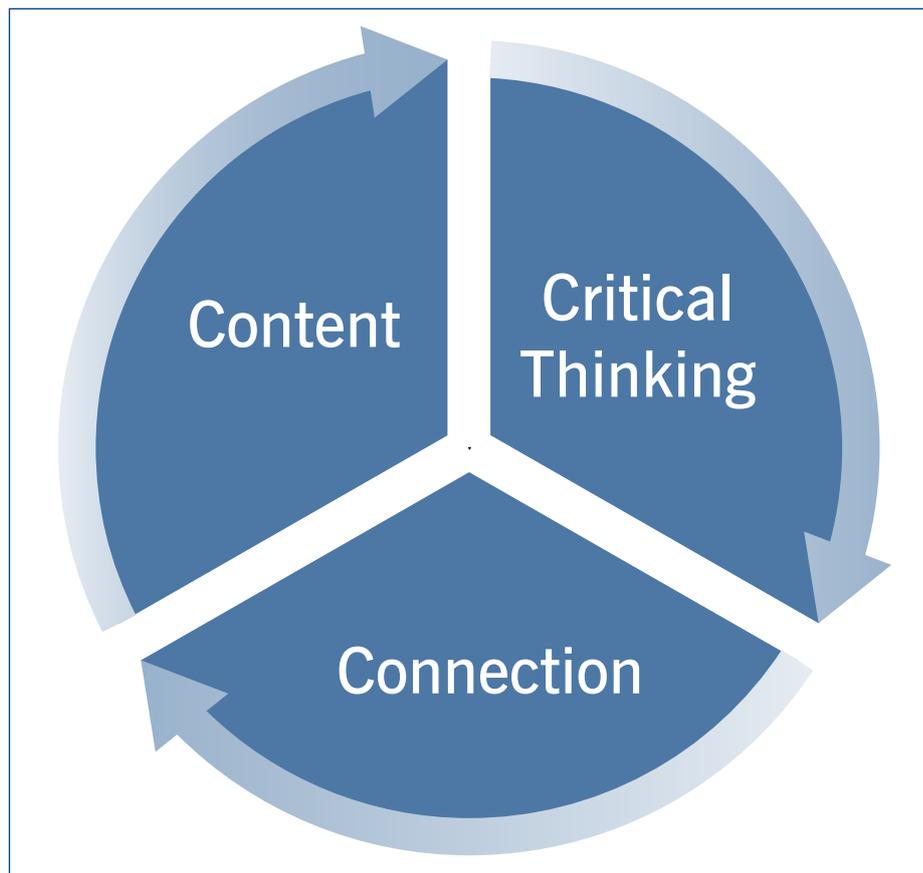
CCE is not currently part of the New Zealand Curriculum, but the curriculum does include areas in which CCE could be incorporated. There are already some

The issue of consistency is exacerbated by the fact that existing notions of citizenship in the New Zealand Curriculum are vague and provide little clear direction for teachers in implementing the principles and values consistent with citizenship (Wood and Milligan, 2016, p.67). This is evident in the findings of the final report of the ICCS study, which concluded that, overall, 'it is somewhat unclear whether there is a consistent view across New Zealand schools about what "civics and citizenship education" ought to involve and what means are effective in developing students' citizenship competencies' (Bolstad, 2012, p.32).

Given that there is much evidence of the importance of CCE, and literature detailing appropriate pedagogy, it is worth considering why CCE is not more prevalent in New Zealand. It has been suggested elsewhere that the pressure and narrow foci of national standards and NCEA assessment and the top-down emphasis on literacy and numeracy have led to these being the subjects reported on and prioritised at the expense of other areas of the curriculum (Harcourt, Milligan and Wood, 2016, p.xiii; Thrupp and White 2013, pp.19-20; Wylie and Bonne, 2016, p.25). As outlined by Harcourt, Milligan and Wood, this has led to the marginalisation of social studies, and can explain the inconsistency of the current approach to CCE (2016, p.xiii). Evidence of poor learning progress for social studies students in years 4–8 in comparison with other subjects suggests that such marginalisation is affecting learning in this area (National Education Monitoring Project, 2005, 2009, cited in Wood and Milligan, 2016, p.68).

It seems that furthering CCE would entail not only addressing issues like consistency, but also some reconsideration of sector priorities. Such reconsideration may not require absolute policy trade-offs: existing priorities are not fundamentally incompatible with CCE and could be revisited with a view to reconciling them with CCE. CCE can provide rich content for literacy and numeracy learning through topics such as voting statistics or political speeches (see Fraser, Aitken and Whyte, 2013, pp.171-3).

Figure 1: Three Cs framework for CCE



**CCE in the community**

In terms of community CCE, work is already underway, with resources for community CCE developed by the Electoral Commission with input from Adult and Community Education (ACE) Aotearoa that provide a template for community groups to start learning about civics and citizenship (Electoral Commission, 2012). Further, information on the 2017 election is available through the Electoral Commission in 27 languages, and English Language Partners NZ has also produced a resource for its work with refugees and migrants (Electoral Commission, n.d.; English Language Partners NZ, 2017). There are numerous other examples, including civics education workshops run by ACE Aotearoa with a focus on prison inmates (ACE Aotearoa, 2015, p.23), the work of Active Citizenship Aotearoa (Wood, 2017), and the Victory Community Centre in Nelson, a community hub connecting the local school and wider community with a focus on building connection and engagement (Stuart, 2010, p.86). However, this work will have limited impact while there is

no coordination between efforts and few resources available for community CCE. Furthermore, there is limited funding for community education in general, with cuts to ACE Aotearoa in recent years having a significant impact (Pollock, 2012).

**Potential next steps**

This article has set out three reasons why civics and citizenship education needs attention if New Zealand is to remain a well-functioning democracy: loss of a common platform for public discourse; lack of knowledge of and interest in how democracy works; and inconsistency in what constitutes CCE. Although we argue that there is a case for change, the current state of CCE in the education and community sectors is not one of crisis. Rather, it presents a picture of promising foundations and existing efforts that would benefit from greater support, strengthening and coordination. This section outlines some next steps drawn from the McGuinness Institute's May 2017 CivicsNZ workshop, and is set out under the Three Cs framework.

### *A framework for CCE*

Figure 1 shows the Three Cs framework for CCE, adapted from Gault and Kriebel (2016). The framework outlines three critical components of CCE which would address the three trends that are threatening the quality of our democracy. *Content* refers to information or 'academic' knowledge about civics and citizenship; *critical thinking* refers to the ability to critically assess and process information; and *connection* refers, firstly, to the application of information to problems in everyday life, and secondly to a sense of belonging to a specific community within society. The importance of connection and critical thinking in CCE, rather than just content, draws from evidence of

Marautanga o Aotearoa and tikanga ā-iwi in kura. However, it may also be necessary to reconsider the current priorities of the education sector. Arguably, subjects like social studies will remain second best until these priorities are revised or even reimagined, by, for example, exploring options for teaching literacy and numeracy through social studies in order to 'elevate' the subject (see Wood and Milligan, 2016, p.71). Although some NCEA literacy credits can already be assessed through social studies, this could be extended by offering more credits, exploring options for aligning the subject with numeracy credits, and recognising the compatibility of social studies with literacy, numeracy,

online CCE hub would make it easier for educators and communities to identify and access CCE content and resources (Tallon, 2016, pp.19-20). The BES method for assessing the quality of citizenship resources could be used to select resources for inclusion in this hub and to guide the development of future resources (Aitken and Sinnema, 2008; Tallon, 2016, p.3).

The idea of CCE hubs is also viable in a community context. For communities that have built or want to build a civics hub, such as the Victory Community Centre in Nelson, it may be worth looking to the Ministry of Education communities of learning/kāhui ako model, which links networks of schools and kura, as a possible foundation for this (Ministry of Education, 2016). The networks within this model could be used to link schools with their communities in ways which foster a sense of belonging, inclusivity and learning, with CCE extending into the community experience (Wood and Milligan, 2016, p.70). Increases in funding may be necessary if CCE is to be accessible to adult learners and those outside the mainstream education sector.

Existing CCE hubs and other community organisations and efforts will be more effective if they are coordinated, working to build relationships and share resources and experiences. Coordination could be facilitated by government or by one of the existing community groups working in this space. The development of further resources suitable for community CCE, similar to the Electoral Commission's resources, would also be beneficial for supporting community CCE.

### *Critical thinking*

#### *Active citizenship approaches and knowing where to look for news*

Critical engagement with current affairs is part of active citizenship. In an era of instant social media and the ability of practically anyone to produce and distribute 'news', critical thinking skills are essential. This highlights the importance of active citizenship approaches to CCE, which entail critical thinking and assessment, as a way to support learners to develop these essential critical thinking skills and help individuals seek out and recognise reliable news sources.

Though no panacea, CCE can serve as a means of securing the democratic character of New Zealand, and ensuring that all can be a part of shaping the future.

effective pedagogy for engendering civic engagement (see Aitken and Sinnema, 2008; Harcourt, Milligan and Wood, 2016; Mutch 2013; Wood and Milligan, 2016).

### *Content*

#### *Bolster social studies and consider policy trade-offs*

Making CCE an explicit learning outcome of the New Zealand Curriculum would help to address issues of consistency. The learning targets for CCE might then be met within the existing subject of social studies. Social studies could be bolstered to support teachers to address CCE with active citizenship approaches and by drawing on existing best practice examples of social studies teachers' work.

Bolstering social studies might entail professional development and guidance, such as advisory support for teachers, as has been available in the past (Aikin, 1995, pp.68-70). Further consideration is necessary regarding whether and how CCE might fit with the vision of Te

New Zealand Curriculum and University Entrance priorities (NZQA, 2017a, 2017b).

### *Aligning curriculum objectives*

CCE might also be linked to other areas of the curriculum beyond social studies, as in the earlier example of linkages between mathematics and CCE through topics like voting statistics. Prospective and practising teachers could be supported by the Education Council and teaching colleges to align curriculum objectives and subject knowledge. This would help to embed the concepts of civics and citizenship in everyday life (Fraser, Aitken and Whyte, 2013, pp.18-20).

### *Pull together CCE hubs and coordinate existing efforts*

Consistent with the recommendations of the Ministry for Culture and Heritage citizenship education resources survey, a single point of coordination and

### *Role for public interest media*

The role of public interest media outlets becomes particularly important for informing public debate and active citizenship when the capacity to critically appraise news and its sources is limited. The 2017 budget increase for Radio New Zealand partially recognises the importance of a trusted public interest media outlet. However, rather than being part of the budget for New Zealand on Air, Radio New Zealand should have a stand-alone budget so that budget trade-offs are transparent and its crucial role for democracy is recognised.

### *Connection*

#### *Civic engagement is more than voting*

Civic engagement takes many forms. There may be value in beginning a national conversation about what we mean when we talk about citizenship, civic engagement and participation. The above-mentioned evidence that people may be participating in civics and citizenship in little-acknowledged ways indicates that citizenship and engagement are not straightforward, static concepts. There is a need to democratise the definitions of civics and citizenship and to co-produce CCE to ensure that it is useful and accessible. How CCE can incorporate concepts like civility, to help underpin political discourse with respect and to further a sense of connection in New Zealand, should also be considered here.

#### *Engaging the disaffected*

Government should do more to

support the participation of groups in society that are less engaged and are under-represented in voting and other citizenship-related statistics. Working partnerships between Māori, Pasifika and migrant communities and government agencies such as the Ministry of Youth Development, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Education, the Department of Internal Affairs and the Electoral Commission may be able to turn civic engagement figures around by appealing to the issues that matter most to these groups, learning more about the driving forces behind disengagement, and co-producing CCE approaches that are relevant and relatable for diverse audiences.

### **Conclusion**

There are strong arguments for safeguarding democracy. Democratic societies are more prosperous, both socially and economically. The three drivers outlined in this article that threaten to undermine the strength of democracy in New Zealand are a significant concern: a loss of a common platform for public discourse; a lack of knowledge about and interest in how democracy works; and inconsistency in what constitutes CCE.

In response to such threats, we propose a case for change to the current state of CCE. There is evidence to support consistent and comprehensive CCE across schools and communities as an effective intervention for preserving and future-proofing democracy. Further, CCE can address the distributional problems in

civic knowledge that have led to the apparent development of a civic empowerment gap in New Zealand, which, in turn, reinforces many of the inequalities we see in society today.

We suggest some next steps that come together as a vision of coordination across a range of actors, such as schools, kura, communities, government, not-for-profit organisations, the media and the private sector. CCE could be made an explicit learning outcome in the New Zealand Curriculum. CCE can support existing priorities for numeracy and literacy, and has a natural home in social studies. Consequently, we argue that social studies should be bolstered to facilitate CCE, through changes such as improved, curated access to online resources and advisory support for educators. Though no panacea, CCE can serve as a means of securing the democratic character of New Zealand, and ensuring that all can be a part of shaping the future.

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1 Here, it is worth considering some safety protocols for ensuring the privacy of students when making submissions, such as the use of school rather than personal details.

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## Civics and Citizenship Education in New Zealand: a case for change?

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