

VALUING CIVICS: POLITICAL COMMITMENT AND THE NEW CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

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The character of civics education is dependent on the worldview in which it is embedded. Thus, citizenship education that is not explicitly committed to a vision of democratic citizenship will be shaped by the dominant ideology of our times: neo-liberalism. After contrasting neo-liberal and radical democratic perspectives on civics education, we examine Australia's new civics initiative as an example of how citizenship education becomes embroiled in the broader didactic politics of neo-liberalism, thus undermining the democratic values of civics education. We conclude with a call for civics education that is politically committed to the values of radical democracy.

Key words: democracy, new civics, neo-liberalism, Discovering Democracy

La nature de l'éducation à la citoyenneté dépend de la vision du monde dans laquelle elle s'insère. L'éducation à la citoyenneté non explicitement vouée à une vision de la citoyenneté démocratique sera donc façonnée par l'idéologie dominante de notre époque : le néolibéralisme. Après avoir comparé les points de vue opposés du néolibéralisme et de la démocratie radicale sur l'éducation à la citoyenneté, les auteurs présentent une nouvelle initiative australienne qui illustre comment l'éducation à la citoyenneté se trouve prise dans l'engrenage de la vaste politique didactique du néolibéralisme et porte ainsi atteinte aux valeurs démocratiques de l'éducation à la citoyenneté. Ils concluent en prônant une éducation à la citoyenneté qui adhère aux valeurs de la démocratie radicale.

Mots clés : démocratie, nouvelle éducation à la citoyenneté, néolibéralisme, Discovering Democracy

In recent years, programs for the renewal of civics education have generated considerable enthusiasm among educators, the political class, and the general public. In response to concerns that social trends associated with declining civic knowledge and engagement are weakening democratic citizenship and threatening the very possibility of meaningful democratic governance, advocates of citizenship education contend that a revitalized civics curriculum is essential to the revival of democracy. There is widespread agreement that civics education is, at bottom, education for democracy. However, when curricular content and pedagogical issues are broached in any detail, agreement on the nature and substance of civics education ends, and what emerges is a range of competing visions on the precise content and purposes of civics education. In other words, rhetorical agreement on the value of teaching civics only serves to hide deeper political disagreements about the proper nature of civics education (Davies & Evans, 2002).

The source of this disagreement is as obvious as it is profound. Our visions of civics education are shaped by the way democracy is defined, by our views on the boundaries of politics, our understanding of the social processes and forces that determine the distribution of political power, and our understanding of the meaning, rights, and obligations of democratic citizenship. These deeply theoretical questions are also intensely political in nature. Indeed, we begin this article from the premise that proponents of citizenship education must be more open and honest about the political nature of advocating for civics education. Because a contestable reading of the meaning and content of democratic citizenship underpins every program of civics education, advocates of civics initiatives are obliged to be explicit about the particular understandings of democracy and citizenship to which they are committed. As our examination of the political rhetoric defining Australia's *Discovering Democracy* program demonstrates, a civics education curriculum that lacks an explicit and firm political commitment to an unambiguous vision of democratic citizenship will, in the end, be shaped by dominant political, ideological, and cultural trends. We show how the Australian program of new civics, which was launched with rhetorical allusions to radical democratic values, became embroiled in a broader politics of neo-liberalism. Lacking a deep-rooted

political commitment to strong democratic values, the Australian government has been unable to resist tying the goals of civics education to a neo-liberal vision of Australia's place in a globalizing world. In the process, the values of critical engagement and democratic citizenship have been largely abandoned.

THE OLD VERSUS THE NEW CIVICS

The Australian campaign to reinvigorate civics education has often been presented as a call for a new civics, an approach to foster democratic citizenship that can be differentiated from old civics (Dickson, 1998; Kennedy, 1998; Print, 1996). Although the distinction between new and old civics is imprecise, it is a useful starting point to examine the differing political and value orientations of programs in civics education. Although the teaching of civics dates back over a century, and was an important part of the curriculum in Australian school systems until the late 1950s, civics was never clearly established as an independent subject with unambiguous disciplinary boundaries (Thomas, 1994). The old civics, as it was taught in the early and mid-twentieth century, focused on the study of government structures and processes from a formal and constitutional perspective, with the central aim to increase civic knowledge and encourage the development of civic skills. Priority was placed on teaching about the constitutional foundations of the political system and the structures of government and politics. Within this formalistic construction of civics education, students were introduced to the roles and expectations of citizens in a liberal electoral democracy (Print & Gray, 2000).

Although rooted in the values of liberal constitutionalism, the old civics had more than one political or ideological face. As critics have pointed out, the old civics was often very conservative (Print, 1996). This conservatism was evident in the ways that mid-twentieth century civics education seemed designed to reinforce the status quo by neutralizing potential support for change-oriented challenges to the political and social order. There was an effort to build community and alleviate political alienation, often accomplished through an emphasis on national and British imperial themes that fostered loyalty to the political system and its founding principles. Indeed, some viewed conservative

manifestations of the old civics as a process of indoctrination aimed at ensuring a passive and quiescent citizenry. Print (1996) summarizes this interpretation of the old civics as “a study of government institutions and political processes liberally laced with adages about being a good citizen . . . taught in a rote, pedantic, and expository manner, with heavy dependence on a conservative text book” (p. 444). In this guise, civics education placed more emphasis on citizenship responsibilities and obligations than on citizenship rights. Indeed, the early New South Wales primary curriculum included a Civics and Morals course for which important components “were lessons in respect for property, industriousness, punctuality and patriotism” (Print & Gray, 2000).

The liberal face of the old civics was evident in programs of civics education that emphasized the active participation of citizens in democratic institutions (Dickson, 1998). Liberal expressions of the old civics tackled the problem of political alienation through an emphasis on our shared status as citizen-voters, as well as through vigorous encouragement of citizen participation in electoral and partisan politics. Far less resistant to change, liberal programs of civics education assumed that the human capacity for reason should outweigh tradition, at least so long as social and political change is largely incremental and achieved through formal democratic processes underpinned by the principle of majority rule. Although never ignoring responsibilities and obligations, liberal manifestations of the old civics stressed the importance of modern citizenship rights.

Although the differences between the conservative and liberal variants of the old civics were significant, they shared much in common. As in America and other liberal democracies, Australia’s old civics was committed to a narrow and formalistic—even legalistic—notion of politics and political activity (Gill & Reid, 1999). The sphere of civics was equated with elections, political parties, and public interest groups that exist to interact with the electoral or legislative systems (Thomas, 1994). The embrace of citizenship rights was limited to the civil and political rights that ensure freedom of speech and political activity. In this model, citizenship was understood passively as “a formally ascribed political status” rather than a “collectively asserted social practice” (Shaw & Martin, 2000, p. 403). Social and cultural rights seldom came into play,

and there was limited desire to encourage an examination of the impact of social and economic power structures on political processes. Finally, in addition to embracing a state-centred conception of politics, the old civics accepted Westphalian assumptions regarding the value, integrity, and sovereignty of nation-states (Print, 1996; Print & Gray, 2000). At a time when England and Empire loomed large, a conception of citizenship as membership in Australia's national political community limited the mission of old civics education (Print, 1996).

The old model of Australian civics began its fall from grace in the mid 1960s, and for the next three decades there was no more than a limited commitment to citizenship education (Print, 1996). Even though history and social studies courses covered some of the content of a basic civics education, support for civics waned until the 1980s and 1990s when studies revealed evidence of a generalized decline in young peoples' civic knowledge (Print, 1998). Grippled by the notion that social trends and deficiencies in the education system were undermining the possibility of democratic citizenship, several influential advisory groups called for a new civics (Civics Expert Group, 1994; Republic Advisory Committee, 1993). Predictably, the basic desire to enhance students' knowledge and understanding of politics and government would be as central to the new civics education as it was to the old. There is, in other words, considerable continuity between the new and old civics. All the same, advocates of the new civics were attempting to develop unique and contemporary approaches to citizenship education (Kennedy, 1998). Not surprisingly, however, these efforts have resulted in only limited agreement on what constitutes the most suitable approach to civics in the contemporary era. As educators, academics, and policy makers turned their minds to the challenge of defining the content and goals of a new civics, the ideological gulf between variants of the new civics education turned out to be even greater than those between varieties of old civics.

VALUE CONFLICTS AND COMPETING SCHOOLS OF NEW CIVICS

Our earlier depiction of advocating for civics education as an inherently political gesture underscored the extent to which debates regarding the proper character and content of citizenship education come down to a question of values. As Hogan, Fearnley-Sander, and Lamb (1996),

Kennedy (1998), and others have argued, the ultimate function of the new civics depends on the worldview in which it is embedded. Although a multiplicity of voices and worldviews are represented in Australian debates regarding civics education, the key ongoing ideological disputes within Australian citizenship education are between radical democrats and neo-liberals.

The advocates of the new civics whom we identify as radical democrats champion social and cultural citizenship rights (Gill & Read, 1999; Hogan & Fearnley-Sander, 1999). They are motivated by egalitarian commitments and the desire to extend democracy while enhancing the political agency of once marginalized citizens. Neo-liberal promoters of new civics, on the other hand, are recognizable by their commitment to well-functioning electoral democracy and enhancing the capacities of citizens to act as self-governing, autonomous individuals. In other words, a significant ideological gulf separates these schools of thought. Because both the radical democratic and neo-liberal schools of the new civics education define their projects as uniquely contemporary responses to the challenge of citizenship education, they share an identification that is rooted in how they differ from the old civics. Furthermore, in the ways they break from the old civics, we find the superficial similarities that have allowed such distinct perspectives to be identified under the common label of new civics. Three of these similarities are particularly significant. First, in contrast to the old civics, both schools of the new civics share a rhetorical commitment to championing active citizenship (Saha, 2000). Second, they both consider the formal and legalistic focus of the old civics too narrow (Hunter & Jiminez, 1999). In admittedly different ways, they build on this observation by highlighting the importance of a broader responsibility to community, as well as claiming that individual self-development, independence, and empowerment are central to democratic citizenship. Third, and perhaps most obviously, they share a desire to respond to the changing social and economic realities of a globalizing world (Print, 1996).

The concept of active citizenship serves as a useful entry point to explore the contrasting ideological worldviews of the two schools of thought on the new civics. Citizens, according to radical democrats,

should not be passive and loyal, nor should their civic activity be confined to formal participation in elections and government. Indeed, radical democrats champion a notion of active citizenship that is defined by democratic participation and involvement in civil society (Patten, 2003). From this perspective, the active citizen is socially engaged and committed to collective problem solving at all levels of the political community. Importantly, this construction of active citizenship as being realized through participation in civil society is premised on an expansive understanding of politics. Politics, as the radical democrat construes it, is about much more than elections and the sphere of state authority. Politics is defined broadly as including all power-structured social relationships. Moreover, because they view the economy and civil society as constituted by such social relationships, radical democrats assume that power and politics are everywhere (Bowles & Gintis, 1986). The essence of active citizenship, then, is social engagement and the capacity to navigate and influence the power-structured social relations that characterize the politics of civil society. Following this, contemporary civics education should aim to enhance—and perhaps equalize—student citizens' capacities for this sort of social engagement.

In contrast to this politicized sense of community, neo-liberals conceptualize civil society as apolitical because it is properly beyond the sphere of state authority (Hindess, 1996). This descriptively and normatively narrow definition of politics allows neo-liberals to conceptualize civil society as the sphere of life in which individual freedom of choice and self-reliance should reign supreme. From this vantage, they associate active citizenship with the social obligation to develop the personal capacities as a self-reliant member of society who contributes through individual enterprise and, where necessary, private voluntary institutions and charity (Rose, 1999). The neo-liberal understanding of active citizenship takes us beyond formal politics. Instead of offering politicized notions of social engagement, neo-liberalism presents a conception of social responsibilities that values active participation in the market economy and voluntary social institutions as a substitute or surrogate for state intervention (Shaw & Martin, 2000).

Both schools of thought offer models of active citizenship that expand the purview of citizenship education beyond formal politics. Both schools require civics educators to take seriously the challenge of fostering young citizens' responsibility in and to the community. The underlying differences associated with the two schools' distinct approaches to defining politics and conceptualizing civil society undermine any possibility of agreement on either the core goals of civics education or the meaning of active democratic citizenship. Although neo-liberals appear to be unswerving in their commitment to electoral democracy, they favour limiting the sphere of politics and the state. In fact, the idea that the market and civil society should be quarantined from political interference is central to neo-liberal notions of democracy. Freedom to pursue one's self-interest is as important to neo-liberal democracy as guaranteeing political rights and regular elections. From this perspective, then, empowering citizens and facilitating individual self-development is essentially a matter of protecting the autonomy of self-reliant individuals. And, moreover, neo-liberals link citizen empowerment to shrinking the realm of the state, so as to guarantee market-like opportunities to exit, that is, to opt out of collective problem solving and pursue one's own course of action (Hindess, 1996).

Radical democrats reject these priorities. They actively challenge the view that civil society and unregulated markets are, by definition, realms of freedom that produce meaningful equality of opportunity. Radical democracy equates democratic citizenship with extensive social and cultural citizenship rights because radical democrats associate citizen empowerment with becoming a full and meaningful participant in the social processes that shape society's cultures (Dhamoon, 2006). Rather than opportunities for exit, this notion of empowerment requires meaningful political agency and voice (Hirschman, 1970). Citizens, the radical democrat argues, are not naturally free and autonomous; they are "socially embedded and constrained subjects" (Dillabough & Arnot, 2004, pp. 161-2) whose lives are shaped by a multitude of power-structured social relations. As such, there is a need to politicize citizens and empower them with social and cultural rights. Radical democrats consider the social citizenship rights associated with public education and welfare state entitlements as a means to active citizenship and

political agency. Cultural citizenship, they argue, concerns the right to be visible, heard, and have the social status of one who belongs within the political community (Stevenson, 2004). Inclusiveness, from this perspective, is the essence of democratic citizenship. Civics education that promotes radical democracy must embrace diversity and difference through the promotion of cultural citizenship rights. Radical democrats insist that social equality is rooted in the capacity to see oneself reflected in the cultures of society, not in the freedom to pursue one's own individual self-interest or course of action.

Advocates of the new civics—both its neo-liberal and radical democratic variants—are motivated, at least in part, by a desire to update citizenship education in response to the changing social and economic realities of a globalizing world. This point is significant because Australia's new civics initiatives emerged in a context of growing awareness of economic globalization (Howard, 2003). As a political ideology, neo-liberalism is closely associated with globalization (Beck, 1999; Hindess, 1996). In Australia, as elsewhere, the neo-liberal political and business leaders of the 1980s and 1990s poured considerable energy into educating voters about the need to adopt a new governing paradigm in response to the so-called realities of globalization (Howard, 2003; Kennedy & Howard, 2004). The perceived imperatives of globalization have similarly driven neo-liberal approaches to civics education, stressing, for example, the obligation of individuals to contribute to society as competitive actors in global economic systems. If active citizenship requires self-reliance and participation in the economic aspects of the community, then citizens have something of a social responsibility to adjust appropriately to changing globalized economic realities. Citizens must be prepared to compete internationally, to feel comfortable doing business in other countries, and take maximum advantage of evolving regional trade communities like the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. Only then can they contribute, as citizens should, to Australia's general economic well-being.

Radical democratic civics offers a different response to globalization. Although both schools share a commitment to look beyond national borders and provide students with the knowledge required to interact with citizens of other countries, radical democrats are less concerned

with cross-national economic exchange. Their goal is to foster a truly cosmopolitan worldview that transgresses national boundaries by developing a genuinely international citizenship that is layered over a sense of national citizenship (Held, 1995). If voice, agency, inclusiveness, and collective problem solving are the essence of active democratic citizenship in the national context, then democratic international citizenship obliges Australians to consider how they can apply these principles to global social and economic relations. In contrast to the neo-liberal emphasis on preparing citizens to take positive advantage of economic globalization and free trade, radical democratic civics promotes strategies of social and economic empowerment that are associated with the democratization of international social and economic relations and what has come to be called fair trade (Goodman, 2002).

Neo-liberalism and radical democracy are also at odds when it comes to tackling the pedagogical challenges associated with teaching civics. Once again, some rhetorical similarities exist. Both schools emphasize the value of service learning—that is, learning by doing, structured around community service—and involving students in selected dimensions of school governance (Rimmerman, 2005, p. 123). But, again, rhetorical agreement hides differences in motivation.

Radical democrats embrace these experiential approaches as a means of demonstrating the ubiquity of politics while enhancing students' sense of political agency. Indeed, radical democrats promote democratic classroom practices that revolve around encouraging the sort of critical reflection that empowers students to challenge conventional wisdom and authority (Tse, 2000). Democratizing the power-structured social relationships that are most immediate in students' lives may be unsettling, but it goes to the core of what radical democratic citizenship education is all about. Neo-liberals are less interested in—sometimes even antagonistic toward—such notions of civic and pedagogical empowerment. School governance and community service, from this perspective, is properly understood as beyond the realm of politics. Where neo-liberals support these activities, they do so because they believe student initiative and community work aid the development of the non-political competencies that are associated with personal

responsibility, self-governance, and self-reliance in a competitive and globalizing world.

AUSTRALIA'S *DISCOVERING DEMOCRACY* PROGRAM AND THE NEO-LIBERALIZING OF THE NEW CIVICS

The task of establishing the conceptual differences between neo-liberal and radical-democratic models of civics education is relatively straightforward. Determining the extent to which recent Australian civics curricula have cohered with each of these models is a more difficult challenge. Visions proposed by curriculum decision makers will likely undergo significant modifications as they are filtered through administrative systems and are implemented in schools, resulting in a variety of interpretations of and positions on the new civics. Recognizing this value complexity, we have concentrated our analysis on the emergence and evolution of political discourses surrounding the new Australian civics program known as *Discovering Democracy* (Hirst, 1998). We contend that neo-liberal goals have been central in the development of these discourses. Although there have been several strong allusions to radical-democratic principles in official pronouncements on the new civics, these have gradually been pushed aside and replaced by a neo-liberal model of values education (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003b). We have restricted our observations to high-level statements concerning curriculum design; we do not address how the new civics is represented and interpreted in classrooms.

Although there was interest in the revitalization of civics education in Australian academic literature and the media in the 1980s (Phillips, 1989), the Australian state did not take an active interest until the Keating Labor government's official enquiry into the possibility of Australia becoming a republic. When the enquiry wrapped up in 1993, the report of the Republic Advisory Committee expressed concern about a lack of civic knowledge among Australians. The Committee believed that Australians required a greater awareness of their political and constitutional traditions to make informed and intelligent decisions about a republic, and recommended a revitalization of civics education to achieve this goal. Prime Minister Keating was also convinced of the importance of Australian citizens developing the political knowledge

and civic awareness necessary to ensure that they appreciated their capacity to enact change within the established constitutional arrangements. In fact, his speeches went so far as to berate Australians for a history of failing to realize their own political agency, and for lacking the maturity to relinquish psychological and economic ties of dependency to Britain (Kennedy & Howard, 2004). The Keating government wanted to inspire a new confidence in Australia's identity. But, importantly, they wanted to anchor that identity in an understanding of economic globalization and the importance of developing relationships with other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. As such, Keating directly tied constitutional reform and the initial impetus for a renewed civics education program to the neo-liberal imperatives associated with developing new trade links with the booming Asian economies (Kennedy & Howard, 2004).

In response to the recommendations of the republican report, the Keating government commissioned an enquiry into civics education, and formed a Civics Expert Group to investigate the need for a new civics curriculum in Australian schools. In its final report (Civics Expert Group, 1994), the Group proffered a damning criticism of the old model of Australian civics, suggesting that the archaic and conservative content and pedagogy made little impression on students because it did not connect with their lives. Any new Australian civics initiative would have to do the opposite.

It is important that the new civics education proposals avoid the weaknesses that beset previous civics education courses – a narrow perspective, unimaginative presentation that passed over the heads of many for whom it was provided, a failure to connect formal subject matter to everyday concerns or grand rhetoric to actual outcomes . . . that left civics as a lifeless imposition on unwilling students. (p. 8)

The Group further argued that citizenship would have to be interpreted broadly in any revised civics program, going beyond formal political participation to encompass a vision of active citizenship.

... 'citizenship' should be interpreted broadly.... The objectives should be to enable Australians to discharge the formal obligations of citizenship.... More than this, the objectives should include those measures that would help Australians to become active citizens. (p. 6)

Although the Keating government's motivations for appointing the Civics Expert Group included a neo-liberal interpretation of Australia's role in the Asia-Pacific region in an era of globalization, the Group's report was not explicitly neo-liberal in tone. Indeed, because it framed its proposal for civics education in the vague and ideologically ambiguous terms of new civics, the Civics Expert Group appealed to both neo-liberals and strong democrats. As such, those who were so predisposed could easily read strong allusions to a radical-democratic vision of civics into, for example, the notion that politics might take place outside of formal political channels.

Citizenship is grounded in a broad range of activities and associations that extend beyond the institutions of government The informed and active citizen appears in a variety of guises—as a concerned shareholder at a general meeting, as a rank-and-file unionists at a workplace meeting, or a resident running for office in local government elections. (pp. 16-17)

As it turned out, Keating's government was ousted in the 1996 election, before it could implement the new civics curriculum that the Civics Expert Group had proposed. However the initiative did not die. The incoming conservative Howard government reviewed the initiatives undertaken by the previous Labor government and instituted its own civics program, called *Discovering Democracy*. Importantly, many of the underlying new civics themes remained the same. For example, in what could have been read as a nod to radical-democratic thinking, the education minister, David Kemp, launched the *Discovering Democracy* program with a statement promising that "*Discovering Democracy* activities will help students to recognise the relevance of their political and legal institutions to everyday life, and to develop capacities to participate as informed, reflective citizens in their civic community" (Kemp, 1998).

Rather than promoting a conservative acceptance of the status quo, Kemp (1997) emphasized the importance of analytical skills and critical thinking, skills that are essential to social engagement and the capacity to challenge conventional wisdom and authority.

[Students] should learn to distinguish between opinion and fact, to mount and evaluate an argument and use supporting evidence, to recognise significant issues and key ideas. Students should be able to recognise different points of

view and to choose and justify a position from among alternatives. (Kemp, 1997, n.p.)

Kemp thought that these skills would enable students to engage in collective problem solving and to deal with conflicts in an independent and democratic manner.

[C]onflicts of interest and ideology are inevitable in a healthy democracy like Australia [Students] will be able to use democratic processes and structures to resolve and manage these conflicts, while maintaining the fundamental rights of all citizens. (Kemp, 1997, n.p.)

Clearly, then, Kemp's *Discovering Democracy* initiative framed the new civics program to appeal to radical democrats, while also never explicitly violating his government's neo-liberal ideological orientation. There was *not*, however, a strong and explicit commitment to the principles of the radical-democratic school of civics and, in time, even rhetorical allusions to radical-democratic values would be sidelined.

In recent years several official evaluations of the implementation of the *Discovering Democracy* program have suggested mixed results in terms of school-level utilization of the new civics curriculum materials (Department of Education, Science, and Training, 2003a). Contrary to what many hoped for, academic assessments of these curriculum materials found them to be conservative in their treatment of Australia's political institutions, as well as consistent with a neo-liberal account of the ideal citizen as productive worker (Hogan & Fearnley-Sander, 1999). Moreover, the most recent government evaluation of *Discovering Democracy* reveals several shifts in government priorities, which appear to pull civics discourses further towards neo-liberalism (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003a). These shifts include the linking of *Discovering Democracy* more closely with Australia's trade agenda, and, in the wake of the 2002 Bali Bombings, enlisting civics education programs to help with the achievement of national security objectives. On this latter point, it is claimed that security increasingly depends on "community harmony and social cohesion" and that the civics curriculum should facilitate this by emphasizing commonalities among Australians (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003a, p. xxiii).

One of the more striking shifts toward neo-liberalizing civics education occurred with the federal government's introduction of "values education" as a central component of the Australian civics curriculum (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003b). The recent values education initiative appears to be motivated by a governmental perception that students need to absorb fundamental personal and social values to build their characters and avert destructive behaviors such as suicide and drug abuse. The values initiative promotes freedom, responsibility, social justice, tolerance, and being ethical as core civic values. Despite the ostensible diversity of values within this initiative, there are several senses in which the movement toward values education is hostile to radical democracy and conducive to neo-liberalism. Firstly, this collection of different values can be grouped together under the theme of personal resilience, which is defined as the ability to be "self-managing" and to deploy individualized "coping strategies." Central components of resilience are said to include "personal responsibility" and "self-discipline" (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003a, p. xxiv; Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003b, p. 5). These values emphasize the obligation of citizens to understand and deal with problems as personal challenges, and to avoid recourse to outside help. Self-help discourse, a key aspect of neo-liberalism, is explicitly hostile to radical-democratic notions of social cooperation.

Secondly, the values education movement also challenges radical democracy's focus on contestation and critique. The new Minister of Education, Brendan Nelson, presents the values as basic moral principles that "underpin the Australian way of life" and thus are widely accepted in the Australian community (Nelson, 2005, n.p.). These civic values are treated as social norms and are not subject to interpretation and negotiation. There is scant acknowledgement of the existence of fundamental value conflicts, such as those between neo-liberalism and social democracy, as well as other political and cultural differences that persist in Australian society. As a result, an imperative to teach and absorb specifically neo-liberal values has replaced the original emphasis on critical questioning in the discourse surrounding *Discovering Democracy*.

The aim of this discussion of the Australian case has not been to suggest that recent Australian civics education initiatives were inherently or exclusively neo-liberal. Rather, we have tried to show how, over time, the new civics has been reconstructed in such a way that it fits into the broader politics of neo-liberalism. The didactic politics of neo-liberalism clearly draws upon notions that are central to the new civics, such as the focus on activity, individual and community responsibility, and the importance of responding to change. But it draws on these notions in a specifically neo-liberal way—emphasizing, for example, the economic and security imperatives of globalization. More than this, when the new civics promotes an individualized perspective on civic action and civil society, it can also be resonant with the withdrawal of the state and shrinking of the political sphere—again, a neo-liberalizing of new civics goals. In sum, the Australian case exemplifies the notion that new civics education initiatives that are not strongly and explicitly committed to radical democracy are vulnerable to being pulled in the direction of powerful neo-liberal political discourses and governing practices. The recent explicit moves to introduce universal values into the Australian civics curriculum provide the clearest example of the vulnerability of new civics initiatives to ascendant neo-liberal discourses.

VALUE COMMITMENTS AND THE FUTURE OF CIVICS

We have argued that advocates of civics education must be explicit about the political values driving their initiatives, lest these programs be inadvertently absorbed into larger political discourses of the day, such as neo-liberalism. This is *not* a call for putting values where values were not previously found. Because neither educators nor policymakers have the capacity to separate themselves from their ideological worldviews, civics education is never value-neutral. Our concern is that some value orientations are hostile to the generally accepted political and pedagogical philosophy of civics education as education for democracy, particularly as this is understood by strong democrats. Even if we accept that there are different varieties of civics, there are important aspects of civics that transcend particular eras and initiatives. At a minimum, civics education must champion electoral democracy, democratic legislative processes, the rule of law, and basic civil rights such as freedom of

speech. In addition, civics invariably fosters some sense of citizenship obligation associated with membership in a political community. Beyond these basic civic values and commitments, we argue that a meaningfully democratic citizenship education requires a commitment to individual and collective political agency, collective problem solving at the level of civil society, and cultural citizenship rights that ensure social inclusiveness. As Davina Woods (1996) argues, civics cannot be neutral about diversity in a pluralistic society; citizenship education must contribute to a sense of community by drawing collective strength from differences, not from an imposed notion of the Australian way of life. For democrats, these values and commitments are essential to political participation, social engagement, and the constitution of a meaningful civic community.

We contend that the new civics initiatives that draw their inspiration from the values of radical democracy best serve the political community. To call for a civics that is animated by a political commitment to radical democracy is not to be overly prescriptive; there is plenty of room for experimentation and variation within the radical-democratic worldview. But it is to call for a civics that encourages thoughtful critiques of existing social and political institutions. It is to call for a civics that fosters a desire to participate in public debate, to politicize civil society, and to respect the value of forms of political action ranging from public service to community action and protest politics. Civics education must also encourage meaningful reflection on the social and political consequences of power-structured social relationships centred on gender, race, sexual orientation, and class. And it must do so in a manner that values difference as a defining feature of community. In contrast, neo-liberalized civics education operates with notions of human nature, community, and politics that are antithetical to active political engagement, democratic criticism, and cultural diversity.

Because Australia's *Discovering Democracy* program has been neo-liberalized, the new civics has been increasingly influenced by a narrative regarding humans as inherently competitive and self-interested. The emphasis on personal responsibility, for example, speaks to the belief that humans are naturally capable of and inclined toward acting as economically self-reliant individuals. From a pedagogical point

of view, it is doubtful that these assumptions can foster the kinds of reflective, reflexive attitudes that should be embodied in the new civics. Thus, rather than opening space for dialogue, the didactic nature of neo-liberalism tends to shut down consideration of alternative narratives about human behavior, including those that stress the social and political primacy of the collective, the capacity for communities to draw strength from differences, or the importance of social and cultural rights.

Although neo-liberalism works heavily with the notion of active citizenship, it propagates a very narrow conception of human agency. In this discourse, becoming active involves becoming more economically productive and taking on new tasks and responsibilities left behind by a withdrawing state (Dean & Hindess, 1998; Rose, 1999). Neo-liberalism denies the possibility for meaningful collective political agency, in part because it suggests that once-sovereign democratic jurisdictions have no choice but to submit to larger global economic forces (Hay, 1998), but also because neo-liberals are more concerned with an individual's right to exit from any collective problem solving, than to enhance agency and voice (Yeatman, 1996). This negative approach to agency runs counter to encouraging students to think about the issues associated with ensuring the inclusion of individuals within social, cultural, and political groupings. As such, neo-liberalized civics education fails to inspire students to become more civic-minded and civically active—in fact, within neo-liberalism there is an unspoken campaign to control the “over-active citizen who stretches the limits of social democracy too far” (Shaw & Martin, 2000, p. 408).

Finally, we have seen how neo-liberalism works to close down public debate about alternative trajectories. This seems at odds with some of the basic premises of civics education. Civic activities are necessarily public in their nature in at least two senses. First, they are visible activities that can be observed, documented, celebrated, and challenged by others. Thus, part of the public quality of civic activity is that it involves, or is surrounded by, open dialogue. Second, the benefits of civic engagement accrue to all members of a given community in roughly equal measure, and are not concentrated on particular individuals. Civics education is designed to enrich the whole political community. Civics education should not be a tool for promoting the

private competencies upheld by neo-liberalism. Only when civics education is focused on how citizens understand themselves as members of a public with an obligation to promote the public good, does it become a genuine form of instruction in the competencies of civic citizenship (Shaw & Martin, 2000). To accomplish this, some form of radical democratic politics must inform civics education. Citizenship education is education for democracy, and champions of civics must always be explicit about their commitment to the values of radical democracy.

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