

Inquiry into civics and electoral education

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Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
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An effective school *Civics and Citizenship Education* Program

At Rosetta Primary School we believe an effective *Civics and Citizenship Education* program involves students:

- Explaining and defending their beliefs on democratic values (e.g. fairness, freedom, equality)
- Explaining and evaluating the operation and historical development of decision making processes, including Australia's political and legal institutions
- Participating effectively in the civic life of the school and wider community
- Developing effective strategies to pursue their own rights and interests, and the rights and interests of others, on issues of public policy

Success Stories from the Civics Classroom

Story 1: Connecting with our Civic Institutions

The work of a three Rosetta Primary School students was recognised with a national award and a presentation to the Governor General in Canberra in December 2005.

Three Grade 6 students won the award as part of the CEFA (Constitutional Education Fund Australia) *Democracy in Schools* pilot project. The students presented a drama item to the Governor General, Michael Jeffery, at Government House in Canberra on what amendments they thought should be made to Australia's Constitution in 1931 as Australia headed towards full independence from Great Britain.

The students chose to present a mock radio talkback show with the then Prime Minister James Scullin and a cast of characters inspired by real events. This format was an effective way to bring history alive and showcased the students' growing understanding of parliament and the Australian Constitution.

Story 2: Exploring Rights and Freedoms

In 2004 a team of Grade 5 Rosetta teachers, through a grant from the DEST *Celebrating Democracy Week* program, developed an innovative unit of work, *Is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) helping the world's children?* The unit involved students exploring picture books, doing internet research and culminated with a model United Nations Assembly.

The unit was a success as the *CROC* framework gave students a manageable framework through which to investigate complex global justice issues. Furthermore, the UN Assembly gave them a way to voice their concerns and present well reasoned views as responsible citizens.

The learning and assessment process was documented and published on the national Civics and Citizenship Education website.

<http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/>

<http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/default.asp?id=9452>

Story 3: Taking action on public policy issues

In 2004 an innovative learning sequence for Grade 5 was developed on ways to reduce the problem of graffiti and vandalism in the local community. The unit involved:

- Extensive collaboration with Tasmania Police, Metro Tasmania and Glenorchy City Council as guest speakers and project partners to explore the problem and current public policy approaches
- Innovative use of ICT to share student research with a wider audience
- Survey of attitudes on graffiti and vandalism in the community and collation and analysis of data
- Production of brochures using ICT for parents and students to share research findings and possible solutions

The project lead to the class receiving the 2004 *Crimestoppers* state Gold award in the Grade 5/6 category for suggesting the best ways to reduce graffiti and vandalism in the local area.

For more information:

http://www.police.tas.gov.au/crimestoppers/youth_challenge

Story 3: Teaching about the 2006 Tasmanian State election

The 2006 Tasmanian state election at the start of this school year provided an excellent context for introducing my students to Civics Education.

In the unit *Elections: How did they become free and fair?* Grade 6 students explored the processes involved in enrolling to vote, casting a

formal vote and methods used to count votes. A mock election was held prior to the real election and results were published through *The Examiner* newspaper student election program.

Furthermore, using the Discovering Democracy unit, *Democratic Struggles* the students explored the efforts made by the Chartists, the Eureka miners and more recently women and indigenous people in their struggles for free and fair elections. The unit culminated with students presenting a persuasive speech to the class from the point of view of a campaigner for women's rights in the 1890s or Aboriginal rights in the 1960s.

Democratic Struggles unit

<http://www.curriculum.edu.au/ddunits/units/ls3struggles-glance.htm>

Links to the Tasmanian *Essential Learnings* curriculum

The *Acting democratically* key element of the Tasmanian *Essential Learnings* curriculum supports and enriches the work we have been doing in *Civics and Citizenship Education*. We like the dual emphasis in the curriculum on learning about our democratic values and institutions combined with opportunities for students to be active and informed participants in our school and local community.

We focus on *Acting democratically* at Rosetta Primary through an extensive program of community involvement and student participation through links with the Glenorchy Council and work on environmental and social justice projects such as Red Cross Youth programs and *Clean Up Australia Day*. We aim to build teamwork and develop a social conscience in our students right from the early years of school.

For older students the SRC (student Representative Council) and other leadership opportunities enable them to take a more active role in the civic life of the school.

Students in these later years of primary school are also encouraged to explore current affairs and undertake projects where they research and scrutinise current public policy issues right across the curriculum (e.g. scientific ethics, detention centres, whaling). The *Crimestoppers* project, outlined above, is an example of this.

Classroom discussion is also a vital part of our work in *Acting democratically*. This year we are aiming to develop more opportunities for students to discuss and deliberate on public issues and philosophical questions through the *Philosophy in Schools* approach (See the work of Phil Cam, UNSW). Complex and sometimes contradictory democratic values like freedom, democracy, respect and support for minorities are rich areas for debate and discussion with

our students. We are finding the *Discovering Democracy Australian Readers* as an outstanding source of narrative texts for exploration of values the classroom.

The three quotes below sum up our views on the importance of classroom discussion and the exploration of public policy issues in an effective *Civics and Citizenship Education* classroom:

"Any issue is political if it is in the public domain and a matter of public policy of any kind. So, anything about rules, laws, issues of fairness of any kind, distribution of social goods such as welfare and education, equality, issues about rights and responsibilities, about public accountability or good governance all count as political"

http://www.citfou.org.uk/teaching_support/tpl.php4

"To encourage civic engagement ...students should have an opportunity to discuss controversial issues and to consider multiple viewpoints on these issues - and all this within an "open" classroom climate that helps students feel comfortable expressing themselves."

Carole L. Hahn (*Social Education*, March 2001)

"Both democracy and understanding rely on student discussion - democracy because forging public policy together is the basic labour of popular sovereignty, and understanding because dialogue is the basis of thinking. Talk is not cheap."

Walter C. Parker (*Social Education*, March 2001)

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