

Civics and Citizenship Education Forum 2007
Meeting key performance makers in civics and citizenship education: A
guide to resources

Introduction

[Slide 1]

There are two interlinking curriculum and assessment documents for the national civics and citizenship education program: the Statements of Learning for civics and citizenship education and the Civics and Citizenship Assessment Domain.

As you have already heard, the former, the Statements of Learning, demonstrate to curriculum developers the opportunities to learn in the civics and citizenship domain in every State and Territory, at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9; while the latter (the Assessment Domain) outlines the Key Performance Markers – the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions – that students need to demonstrate in this domain at Years 6 and 10.

It is assumed, therefore, that students will be provided with the opportunities to learn in the civics and citizenship education domain to enable them to meet the requirements of the Assessment domain at Years 6 and 10.

[Slides 2 and 3]

In order to support you to assist your students in meeting those requirements, I have conducted an audit of the Discovering Democracy resources – the Discovering Democracy Units and The Discovering Democracy Australian Readers – and matched their content to the themes of this Forum, and to the Key Performance Marker Descriptors for of the Assessment Domain.

The results of that effort are the two documents – Discovering Democracy Resources and the Civics and Citizenship Assessment Domain (Primary) and Discovering Democracy Resources and the Civics and Citizenship Assessment Domain (Secondary).

You'll note that the resources have been mapped against the Assessment Domain Descriptors for four levels of schooling – Middle Primary, Upper Primary, Lower Secondary and Middle Secondary – to ensure that they are at the forefront of teachers' minds when providing students with the opportunities to learn in the civics and citizenship domain through the Discovering Democracy Resources.

These resources were developed for the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training by Curriculum Corporation, and distributed to schools. They should already be part of your resource cupboards or in your school libraries. The Discovering Democracy Units are also available on the Civics and Citizenship Education website.

National Assessment Program

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I intend to spend the next few minutes elaborating on the elements of the two mapping documents. In order to do that, I need to briefly mention the findings of the testing carried out in the domain in 2004, which are contained in the *National Assessment Program, Civics and Citizenship Years 6 and 10 Report*.

This sample testing was conducted in 2004, and the results were finalised and released in December last year. As you are aware, the results were mixed, with some jurisdictions performing above the proficiency levels set by the assessors, and others below, but the

overall results did not meet assessor expectations at the two levels of schooling – Years 6 and 10.

The report also found that there were weaknesses and gaps in students' understanding with regards to concepts such as the 'Common Good'; and 'iconic knowledge', such as knowledge about national symbols and key national events.

The DD Resources

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The Discovering Democracy resources are replete with information and student learning activities on national symbols and key national events. For example the Discovering Democracy Middle Primary unit – *We Remember* asks students to engage with the symbols of Australia's democracy and the nation, to understand the importance of commemoration days, and to consider why the symbols of the nation have changed overtime.

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These understandings are reinforced in the Australian Readers topics *Lest We Forget*, at Middle Primary; *True Patriots*, at Upper Primary; and *The Stories We Tell about Ourselves*, at Lower Secondary, to highlight just a few examples. All of these units and topics are mapped against the Assessment Domain Descriptors in the mapping documents.

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You will find no reference to the 'Common Good' on your mapping documents. This nebulous, elusive concept, however, a legitimising ideal in most democratic states, is there in spirit if not in fact.

That is to say, it is implied in many of the topics and themes of the Discovering Democracy resources, but its elucidation depends on how we, as educators, choose to unpack the units and the activities, and on how we chose to apply the concept.

In fact, we are already teaching it; we may just need to make it more obvious to students. I intend to assert that this is entirely possible with this range of resources, and I will demonstrate by example, highlighting the relevant topics along the way.

Finding the ‘Common Good’ in the DD Resources

The ‘Common Good’, of course, lies at the centre of most communities. Indeed, it gives communities their reason for being. What it is, how it is constituted, how it is realised in governance, and how it evolves and changes overtime are, however, some of the questions we should be asking when we use the Discovering Democracy Resources.

What is meant by the ‘common good’?

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It is enough for students to realise, in the first instance, that the ‘common good’ transcends individual interests. A good place to start would be the Discovering Democracy unit Rules and Laws (Middle Primary), which addresses law making, and asks students why laws were necessary.

By working through this unit students will be able to arrive at the reasons for law and how to test for ‘good law’ through the application of the principles of fairness and equality. They will

also be required to simulate law making and make laws for the good of all, a very direct application of the ‘common good’.

The section Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, in the Upper Primary Reader, contains texts on the Civil Rights Movement and Women’s Suffrage in the US, and the 1967 referendum, that will further assist students’ understanding of just law at this level.

How is the ‘common good’ constituted?

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Here the most obvious historical case study is Federation, the debates that surrounded it, and the compact that evolved from them. The Australian colonies in the end contracted to pursue a ‘common good’, whether that be free trade or military defence, but they put in place measures that would also guarantee the interests of the smaller prospective states, even if that had to be at the expense of the larger colonies. The greater purpose, or the common good’, was therefore considered to be worth the sacrifice. People Make a Nation, an Upper Primary Unit, explores Federation in detail.

The Middle Secondary Unit ‘Parties Control Parliament’ extends the understanding of the ‘common good’ by demonstrating that it is always contested within a democracy, and that political parties, representing different ideological conceptions of the ‘common good’ compete for democratic mandates by contesting elections for parliament. In this unit students examine the historical origins of Australia’s main political parties, the ideological divisions that they represent and their function in Australia’s democracy.

How is the ‘common good’ realised in governance?

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While capturing parliament in a representative parliamentary democracy provides the mandate that political parties seek to implement their version of the ‘common good’, the Australian system of government, however, ensures that this ‘democratic will’ is diluted, as it divides legislative power between two houses of parliament, and divides sovereignty between two levels of government.

These constitutional checks are fruitful investigations for students, and will develop in them a complex understanding of how the ‘common good’ is arrived at in liberal democracies such as Australia. The Units People Make a Nation (Structure of Federal Government - Upper Primary); Law (The Australian Constitution and the role of the High Court - Lower Secondary); and Making a Nation (the balance of power between state and federal government – Middle Secondary) will allow students to delve into this complexity.

How does the ‘common good’ evolve?

The civil and political rights pertaining to individuals in liberal democracies ensure that the ‘common good’ is always contested, and that it is forever evolving to accommodate new social and political circumstances.

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Two of a number of examples from the Discovering Democracy resources would include the 1967 Indigenous referendum (Lower Secondary) and the Franklin Dam dispute in the early 1980s (Middle Secondary).

Both events involve momentous political change, and both are examples of seismic shifts in public opinion and social values. In

1967, Australians overwhelmingly extended the ‘common good’ to include Indigenous Australians, by endorsing equality as one of their defining principles, while the Franklin Dam dispute was a signal that environmental values and sustainability had begun to play a part in shaping the nation’s attitude to public policy and in its construction of the ‘common good’.

[Slide 12 (Transition)]

The kinds of dispositions, knowledge and skills relied upon by citizens to bring about this kind of historical change is dealt with in the Australian Readers, especially in Political People (Middle Secondary).

Conclusion

To perform in the upper levels of the proficiency bands in the National Assessment Domain, students need more than a basic understanding of key civics and citizenship concepts and knowledge.

In fact, the descriptors in the report require that students demonstrate complex understanding and interpretative abilities in their explanation and use of civics and citizenship concepts and knowledge. As I have demonstrated by overlaying the concept of the ‘common good’ on the curriculum map, the Discovering Democracy materials are a sound range of resources for cultivating that kind of student engagement and understanding, and hence are a step towards closing the gap in student learning exposed by the testing in this domain.