

Transforming civics and citizenship education
in the middle years of schooling:
an exploration of critical issues informing teachers'
theories of action.

Thesis submitted by
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The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the national *Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Human* (1999), the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (1997), the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics: Standard Practices and Guidelines* (2001), and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee (approval number H784).

Robert Neville Jennings

Date

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ABSTRACT

In the past decade there has been a revival of interest in civics and citizenship education at the national and global level. While the revival of interest has influenced all levels of education, this study has a particular focus on civics and citizenship education in the middle years of schooling. It recognises that classroom teachers are “policy actors” who make individual meaning out of official policies on civics and citizenship education. On the other hand, it recognises that teachers are also autonomous agents who sometimes act independently of “official knowledge”. The aim of the study is to identify critical issues informing teachers’ theories of action as they seek to engage young adolescents in meaningful learning experiences. The study is based on the assumption that young adolescents between the ages of 10 and 14 have specific needs and characteristics that present unique challenges for teachers of civics and citizenship education.

The study uses a case study approach based on a selection of schools in Northern NSW and South Eastern Queensland. Participating teachers in an inner reference group conducted action research projects to investigate their theories of action in relation to civics and citizenship education. Data were also collected from an outer reference group of critical friends comprising teachers in other schools, teacher educators, consultants and trainee teachers sharing an interest in citizenship education. The study seeks to redress a perceived gap in the research literature about the knowledge, pedagogical skills and attitudes needed by teachers to make civics and citizenship education more meaningful for young adolescents.

The study is founded on a conceptual framework of “critical theory” (Habermas, 1972; Fay, 1987; Carr and Kemmis, 1993). Critical theory provides a

basis for understanding the critically reflective skills of teachers and also provides an epistemological base for the critical action research methodology used in the study (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000). A series of semi-structured interviews with participating teachers over periods of one to three years provides a primary source of data on how teachers approach civics and citizenship education and the critical issues that inform their theories of action. Data are also collected by means of direct observation, keeping of professional journals and content analysis of policy and syllabus documents.

Analysis of the data reveals three sets of critical issues: the first resulting from teachers' self reflection; the second identifying teachers' response to "official knowledge"; and the third identifying opportunities for transformative action. An analytical model is used to portray the relationships between critical issues that influence teachers' theories of action when they engage young adolescents in civics and citizenship education. The analysis identifies the critical issues that teachers of young adolescents face as they move from a concern to reproduce society towards a concern to transform society through civics and citizenship education programs. The study contains critical reflections on the research process and on the process of providing education for democracy. A practical outcome of the study is a set of guidelines for professional development programs seeking to develop a critical pedagogy of civics and citizenship education in the middle years of schooling.

TRANSFORMING CIVICS AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION
IN THE MIDDLE YEARS OF SCHOOLING: AN EXAMINATION OF
CRITICAL ISSUES INFORMING TEACHERS' THEORIES OF ACTION

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