Growing ‘citizens-in-action’

Report on Principal Sabbatical Project PPS/10234

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Introduction

On a wintry Thursday afternoon in a classroom somewhere in New Zealand a group of year three and four children are massed around a groundsheet with a pile of food wrappers, clingfilm and snaptop bags. As they count the items their rising excitement is palpable; "38, 39, 40…" until, with a flourish, the final item is added, "48! That's heaps less than last week!" The recorder plots the new figure onto a computer spreadsheet and as a column graph flashes onto the big screen a cheer worthy of an All Black try rings around the room. "A new record! First time below fifty, yay!!"

These children are engaged in a social action inquiry. The mission they set themselves two months earlier was to eliminate food wrappers and plastic bags from the environment. When they realised that changing the world or even the school was beyond their reach they took up the challenge of changing themselves by trying to eliminate all plastic from their lunchboxes. Their initial audit revealed a daily average of about 200 food wrappers in the lunchboxes of the 56 children in their team. Now, two months later, many families have shifted to 'nude food' lunchboxes and altered their shopping habits to eliminate pre-packaged lunch food. The Thursday rubbish audit has become a highpoint of the week and, as the children have watched the food wrapper graphline fall steadily, a fabulous motivator to maintain their efforts towards reaching that magic zero. Emboldened by their success they are planning to take the initiative to the rest of the school.

I call these children 'citizens-in-action', engaged in a learning project anchored in a real-life problem, designing interventions that have tangible and meaningful outcomes, and discovering the power and satisfaction of changing their world. They are students at Wakefield School in Nelson, where for several years we have been constructing our response to the challenge of how schooling can best be 'fit for purpose' in today's - and tomorrow's - world. Our emerging curriculum draws heavily upon concepts of citizenship, social action, democratic learning and

student agency, delivered through collaborative teaching and learning that happens within and across a range of settings.

Initially this project was guided by the question, ‘what do we allow as relevant social action outcomes in a student-led curriculum?’ If we desire a curriculum that enables children to be citizens-in-action what kinds of actions can and should we consider as being appropriate, desirable and achievable for students? Noticing that many of our social action inquiries to date have had a strong environmental focus, and assuming there are many more actions than planting trees or cleaning up the local stream (while not diminishing the importance of these), if we could nevertheless investigate all the actions we consider valid and useful what would be on the list?

A couple of other questions followed closely on the heels of the first. One was how do we stop our inquiry 'cycles' from always being linear? If we are really honest with ourselves we realise that our inquiry topics are never really cyclical: they always end, usually abruptly, usually when the term finishes or the next teacher-directed topic comes up on our curriculum programme. Our experience seems not uncommon among schools (Boyd & Hipkins. 2012, p. 16). The food wrapper investigation described above gained some of its success through the teachers allowing the project to run through several iterative cycles (in fact it continues in the school to this day, over a year later). In doing so they wrestled with the usual issues of time pressure and opportunity cost: what vital learning was being missed out by letting that project continue?

Another important question was that by promoting citizenship-in-action as a focus of our curriculum are we ruling out subjects of inquiry that do not lend themselves to social action outcomes? This question was captured in a debate we had when a teacher wanted her students to study ancient Egypt but felt constrained because she couldn’t see how the topic lent itself to a social action outcome. Must we always link learning to social actions?

During the project two other questions became significant: what does (and could) ‘citizenship’ mean to a five year old, an eight year old, a ten year old? How can we make Wakefield School a ‘laboratory for growing citizenship’? Consideration must be given to the behaviours, systems and mindsets necessary to foster citizenship, and the challenges and pitfalls this work holds for staff, students and families.

Our experiences of allowing children at Wakefield School to learn as citizens-in-action are encouraging: children are generally eager to engage with learning grounded in ‘real-life’ ideas and issues knowing they are expected, and will be enabled, to take action. With the encouragement to take action even young children often surprise us with their ability and willingness to solve difficult problems, collaborate, persevere, acquire new information and skills, and create new knowledge (Briggs et al, 2017). Emboldened by these experiences and challenged by the questions arising from our experiences, this project aims to deepen our understanding of citizenship education and widen the range of potential actions available to us. The project attempts to define key concepts of citizenship, democracy and community in the context of contemporary New Zealand society and education, and gathers examples of learning

topics with social action outcomes from literature, research and current practice in New Zealand, Canada and the USA.

This report falls short of providing definitive answers to the questions that directed the project, but hopefully it offers a few ideas and insights to help us meet the challenge of sustaining meaningful and relevant teaching and learning for the 21st century: like everything we do in education it is a work-in-progress.

Why citizenship?

The idea of enabling children to be 'citizens-in-action' has been useful in guiding our thinking and progress. It was inspired to some degree by the work of Dr Rosemary Hipkins and others who raise the question, "are students citizens in preparation or active citizens now?" (Hipkins, et al, 2014, p.113). They point to the expectation within the New Zealand Curriculum that learning experiences should build students' capabilities to promote "the social, cultural, economic, and environmental wellbeing of New Zealand" (MOE, 2007, p.13), and that learning should reflect our students' and community's needs and interests and address "real-life situations" (ibid, p.38). Hipkins et al argue the power of "thoughtful and empowering collective actions" as a means of engaging students and giving them "a strong sense of belonging to their school and wider community" (Hipkins et al, 2014, p.113).

Research from a UK and European perspective encourages a view that learning to be active citizens is a necessary part of every child's life, and should be a natural acquisition of skills and values. This doesn't mean we can leave it to chance or nature to educate young people to be citizens. Gert Biesta argues that while citizenship can be learned through daily life we need to ensure that the right conditions prevail to allow this learning to happen:

> The most significant forms of civic learning are likely to take place through the processes and practices that make up the everyday lives of children, young people and adults and ... the conditions that shape these processes and practices ... deserve our fullest attention if we really are concerned about the future of democratic citizenship and about the opportunities for democratic learning in school and society" (Biesta, 2011, p.98).

Biesta sees schools as places where citizenship can be learned: "schools should model the kind of society in which active citizenship is encouraged by providing all young people with opportunities to take responsibility and exercise choice" (Biesta, 2011, p.20). It seems to me that the words 'model' and 'opportunities' point to two different but complementary ways that schools can promote citizenship learning. Through their organisational structures and behaviours schools are small functioning models of broader society, where individuals have rights and responsibilities, where decisions are made through contestable processes, where the common good is promoted in ways that allow all to flourish while not stifling the development of any of its members. Children, simply by being members of a school, are learning about

citizenship every day. They observe how power is managed, how decisions are made, how their lives can be altered for better or worse by the actions of their peers and people in authority. Biesta encourages the view that active citizenship is easily attainable by children and young people because they are "already practicing citizens through their participation in social life" (ibid, p.13).

This is part of what I think of as the 'informal' curriculum in a school, the myriad small interactions, often unremarked and barely conscious, that nevertheless weave a dense web of experience and learning for children. Advocates for greater student voice in schools are responding to the untapped potential in this informal curriculum, the opportunity for schools to use their own processes to advance educational goals such as citizenship. Even if we don't go so far as including students in all our decision-making we should at least realise that everything we, the 'grownups', do at school is keenly observed by our students and we should constantly check ourselves by asking 'are we modelling the kinds of behaviours we want our children to practice when they become in charge?' Some schools are good at this: the practice of student involvement in school governance at the Brooklyn Free School in New York is described later in this report.

The word 'opportunities' in Biesta's quote offers a second pathway to promote citizenship learning, through the more 'formal' curriculum - the stuff we do with children that we call teaching and learning - and examples of this are explored in the Practicing Citizenship-in-Action section of this report. The New Zealand Curriculum (MOE, 2007) carries a clear imperative to include citizenship learning. The word 'citizenship' appears throughout the document: in the Vision (p.8) as 'international citizens' within the 'connected' part of 'confident, connected, actively involved, and lifelong learners'; and again on p.10 as an example of a value expressed through the theme of 'community and partnership for the common good': in the Principles (p.9) within the Future Focus principle: in the Design and Review section (p.39) as 'exploring what it means to be a citizen and to contribute to the development and well-being of society': and in the Social Sciences learning area statement (p.30) as 'how societies work and how people can participate as critical, active, informed and responsible citizens.' Relevant Social Science achievement objectives by level are:

Level One:

- Understand how belonging to groups is important for people
- Understand that people have different roles and responsibilities as part of their participation in groups.

Level Two:

- Understand that people have social, cultural and economic roles, rights and responsibilities
- Understand how people make significant contributions to New Zealand's society.

Level Three:

- Understand how groups make and implement rules and laws
- Understand how people make decisions about access to and use of resources.

At Wakefield School we have included citizenship learning as a specific goal in our school curriculum, within the context of co-constructed learning. Specifically, we state our intention that "children learn to participate effectively in democracy through citizenship and civics education in authentic contexts"; that "children have agency, for example, through shared decision-making processes"; and "children learn through leadership". Citizenship goals are defined further in our inquiry programmes

- For children in years 1-3: "Children develop a sense of belonging to their family, community and environment".
- For children in years 4-6 "Children learn how societies work and how people can participate as critical, active, informed and responsible citizens".

What is citizenship? What is action?

If we wish to enable children to be citizens-in-action we should understand what we're getting ourselves into: what is 'citizenship'? What is 'action'?

The Oxford Dictionary defines a citizen as "a native or naturalized member of a state or other political community", and citizenship as "the status of a citizen with rights and duties" (Oxford Dictionary, retrieved online). The Collins Dictionary defines citizenship as, "the fact of belonging to a community because you live in it, and the duties and responsibilities that this brings" (Collins Dictionary, retrieved online). Writing in an educational context Fullan and Langworthy discuss citizenship in the context of "global knowledge, sensitivity to and respect for other cultures, active involvement in addressing issues of human and environmental sustainability" (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014, p.22).

At a broad level citizenship embraces concepts of community, rights and duties: one cannot be a citizen in isolation, and the rights of citizenship are maintained by fulfilling certain obligations to and within the community in which citizenship is enacted. As an expression of humans as social creatures, citizenship exists for each of us across multiple and concurrent settings: we are at once citizens of our family, our neighbourhood, town, region and nation. We express citizenship through our membership of sports teams, service organisations, clubs and virtually any other forum in which we gather with others to fulfill a common purpose. This is significant for teachers considering a curriculum that enables children to be citizens-in-action: being aware that citizenship can be learned and enacted in a wide range of social settings opens the potential for the class, learning group and school as valid communities in which to practice citizenship. It allows us to uncouple citizenship from a purely political context that may be off-putting or confining for teachers and students, certainly at the level of primary school.

To help us understand citizenship a bit better Biesta considers the concept in three dimensions:

- Personally responsible
- Participatory
- Justice-oriented (Biesta, 2011, p.29).

He explains the differences with an example: “if participatory citizens are organising the food drive and personally responsible citizens are donating food, justice-oriented citizens are asking why people are hungry and acting on what they discover” (ibid, p.30). In the context of the food wrapper inquiry among the year three and four students at Wakefield School we could say participatory citizens introduce nude food lunchboxes to encourage other students and families to reduce their food wrappers, personally responsible students choose to limit their own food wrappers, while justice-oriented citizens might explore ways to minimise the damage caused to wildlife and the environment from dumping single-use plastic wrappers.

Biesta does not offer a view on whether he thinks all three are necessary to acquiring full citizenship, nor whether he considers them equally important, but he believes the three modes are not cumulative; in other words we do not start out as personally responsible citizens and ‘advance’ towards being participatory and then justice-oriented. We can be all three at once and, importantly, we can learn at once about being all three. Biesta notes criticisms of the personally responsible citizen from other researchers who describe it as “an inadequate response to the challenges of educating a democratic citizenry”, that “voluntarism and kindness are put forward as ways of avoiding politics and policy” (ibid p.31). These criticism are echoed in the New Zealand context by Bronwyn Hayward (2012), who believes we neglect the justice-oriented dimension in schools and encourages more politicised activities (see below, p.9). Biesta cites further criticism of a focus on the personally responsible citizenship as, “values implied in the notion of the personally responsible citizen can be ‘at odds with democratic goals’” (ibid p.31). This refers to citizenship education in which the emphasis on teaching young people the values and behaviours of personal responsibility encourages a highly individualistic view of themselves in the world, at odds with democratic citizenship, which needs additional skills of collective action and a commitment to the common good.

As it’s turned up in our story, we should also consider what we mean by ‘democratic’, because obviously it links closely to citizenship and also, within our educational context, to social action. Biesta, again: “democracy, in its shortest formula, is about learning from difference and learning to live with others who are not like us” (ibid, p.70). Like Fullan’s & Langworthy’s definition of citizenship, this definition of democracy is active; it’s about taking responsibility, learning skills, dispositions, attitudes that foster tolerance, cooperation, broad-mindedness. Seen in this light, learning democracy is a formative experience, something that happens during and throughout life, an essential part of being the lifelong learner we want our children to be. Jacques Ranciere has called this a ‘subjective’ interpretation of democracy, in contrast to a ‘socialised’ interpretation which holds that political identities and the skills of rationality and impartiality have to be learned *before* participation can occur (in Biesta, 2011, p.89). Just as we can accept that children can be citizens-in-action and not just citizens-in-preparation, by taking the subjective approach to learning democracy we can also recognise children as ‘democrats-in-action’.

This is crucial for citizenship education because understanding democracy is fundamental to children being active citizens (Beane, 2005), and if the core of democracy is about learning how to get on with others it is also fundamental to our responsibility as teachers to enact the vision,

principles and key competencies of the New Zealand Curriculum and, for that matter, our commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi and the wellbeing of our democratic society.

Understanding the distinction between subjective and socialised democratic learning is helpful for teachers' confidence to engage in democratic learning with students. Here I should clarify what I consider to be the distinction between 'democratic learning', which is the application of democratic principles and practices in the learning environment, and 'learning democracy', which is the study of the rules, procedures and structures of democratic societies and their institutions. Introducing democratic learning at Wakefield School made some staff anxious about the implications for the direction of teaching and learning: would it mean children were given the freedom to decide what they would, and would not, learn? How would they understand their democratic responsibilities and not just their rights? On the other hand learning about democracy also seems to create anxiety for some teachers: does learning democracy mean learning politics, and if so will they risk being seen to be indoctrinating children with a particular political agenda? Will children even be able to grasp democratic concepts?

Taking a subjective interpretation of democracy is, I think, helpful here because it offers a formative approach in which teachers do not need to be 'experts' in civics education before they engage students. Sufficient prerequisites are:

- an understanding of some of the principles of democracy (because even a subjectified approach is not anarchic), such as liberty, equality, tolerance, respect for diversity, engagement with differing points of view
- an understanding of our personal beliefs and practices of democracy (not confined to politics)
- the skills of being a teacher who is a facilitator and has the confidence to work across all modes of teaching and learning from teacher-directed to student-centred
- our confidence in a shared model of practice based upon a negotiated definition of our school as a democratic organisation in which we have clarified roles and responsibilities, relationships of power, ways of negotiating and mediating
- an understanding that we can practice democracy at school just as we can practice citizenship when we recognise that the class, learning group and school is a democratic community, and that we can manage any issues that arise if we treat it as a 'laboratory for learning'
- being comfortable that democracy is a process that is fundamentally open and undetermined - an ongoing experiment.

Social action and social justice

Fullan & Langworthy's definition of citizenship highlights the responsibilities of citizenship: we need to know about the world, we need to be sufficiently broad-minded to understand and accept cultural difference, we must be actively involved in issues. On this basis citizenship

cannot be defined in isolation from our other key concept - action. Citizenship is action, or at least it encompasses the responsibility to take action. In other words, one cannot be a citizen simply by existing passively within a community or other social group. The Scottish National Curriculum specifies that "learning about citizenship is best achieved by being an active citizen" (Biesta, 2011, p.23), and that active citizenship may embrace a range of social and political actions.

But this raises an obvious question: what actions are more or less likely to promote active citizenship? If I choose to shop at the Wakefield Four Square or pick up a piece of rubbish as I'm walking through Faulkner's Bush, or join with my neighbours in a community dinner, I am participating actively in my community and could be said to be acting as a citizen of Wakefield, but am I satisfying an inquiry learning definition of taking action? Every action may, in a broad sense, be regarded as a 'social action', but for the purpose of educating children about citizenship and democracy we need a tighter definition that links actions to issues and outcomes.

William Scott defines action learning as "the chance to take part in - and critically reflect on - real decision making within their school and wider community" (in Hayward, 2012, p.75). This hearkens to Biesta's concept of justice-oriented action and by this definition the 'nude food' lunchbox initiative may fall short of social action learning until, say, it engages with other students and the school leadership to make nude food lunches a policy in the school, or it works with the community to encourage the local supermarket to stop using plastic shopping bags. By this definition perhaps a better example of social action learning at Wakefield School is the student enviro team running predator control traplines in Faulkner's Bush, a reserve adjacent to the school, in partnership with a community group and the local Council. These students are encouraged to reflect on the benefits to the community as well as the native bird populations of improving the health of the reserve by removing rats and stoats.

Bronwyn Hayward also identifies the need for a more justice-oriented approach if we are to really tackle the difficult problems facing us:

> given that many of the most significant environmental impacts today, such as tar sand mining, fracking, large scale logging and growing food insecurity, are tacitly endorsed by government policy, it is disturbing that both citizenship and environmental education are becoming more depoliticised. A great deal of attention and funding has focused on teaching children to recycle, grow their own food and reduce their carbon footprint, but startlingly little emphasis is given to providing children with opportunities to learn to resist the illegitimate exercise of state power (Hayward, 2012, p.72).

Hayward's prompt is to encourage education in 'social dissent' which, given the severity of some of the problems facing the world and the intractability of some of our leaders to help solve them, is not unreasonable. At some point our children must learn the world really does need to be saved and that to do so will require them to think and act within a bigger context than their

family, school or community. However, given the discomfort mentioned earlier in this report that many teachers feel about directly engaging students in politics it is unsurprising that citizenship education is 'depoliticised', at least in mainstream schools in New Zealand. An example of more politically engaged learning in a North American school is given in the following section, with a further example of our attempt to introduce children at Wakefield School to politics through an election.

Regardless of motivation and context the key to learning through social action is, simply, to act. "If the ultimate goal is for students to be able to participate as critical, informed, and responsible citizens, they need to be given opportunities to practice taking action" (Bull, Joyce & Hipkins, 2014, p.13). In this report from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) the authors encourage a 'citizenship approach' to learning, with the emphasis on students taking action. In doing so they invoke a tradition of action-based learning stretching back over 100 years to the work of John Dewey in the USA. They emphasise that in education today knowledge is the servant of action: "we do think that knowledge is important, but the goal is to be able to *do* something with this knowledge" (ibid, p.4). Their report is specifically in regard to teaching and learning the Nature of Science strand of the New Zealand Curriculum but is equally true for all learning that promotes the ideas in this report.

From these considerations a definition of social action in education may reasonably include:

- Identifying and defining a real issue that affects the students, their families, the school and/or the community
- Exploring and testing solutions to the issue
- Reflecting on actions, refining and retesting solutions
- Participating in, and sometimes initiating, dialogue with adults-in-authority that raises awareness of the issue and explores broader initiatives for change
- Inquiry learning that is genuinely cyclical, allowing students to reiterate the problem and their responses across extended timeframes.

Examples of citizenship-in-action

The following examples of social action learning address a major question of this project: what kinds of actions can and should we consider as being appropriate, desirable and achievable for students? They are drawn from visits to schools and conversations with academics and teachers in Wellington, Toronto and New York during 2017, and from publications and our work at Wakefield School.

Courageous Voices - East Alternative School Toronto (EAST)

EAST is one of a dozen or so publicly-funded alternative schools in Toronto. At EAST the Year Eight students dramatise social justice themes in an annual production through the concept of 'heroism'. Students select a person who is heroic to them, having first explored definitions of heroism. They research their hero and justify their choice to their peers who decide if that hero can be included in the production. The heroes selected are generally people who dedicated their lives to overcoming injustice or promoting a cause; feminism, the environment, racial

discrimination, gay rights, disabled rights. Once the choice of heroes is decided the students work together to explore the issues raised through the lives and work of their selected individuals and present their stories through voice, movement, music and visual art in an original piece of theatre. The project takes several months to prepare and is performed in a local church for family, other students and community. A closer view of Courageous Voices is at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-9-nZfqiFo&t=304s. A review of the 2017 Courageous Voices is included in this report (Appendix One).

Courageous Voices is citizenship-in-action because it enables students to grapple with issues important to their personal lives and their community. Through performing and visual arts the students act on their knowledge and discoveries, promoting the messages of justice, hope and equality that their heroes enacted. Students become empowered as agents of change and learn to incorporate the values and behaviours of their heroes into their own lives and to encourage the same in the lives of others around them.

Student participation in school governance - Brooklyn Free School, New York

The Brooklyn Free School - http://www.brooklynfreeschool.org/ - is a private alternative school in New York city, funded largely through tuition fees and donations. The school mission is to educate for social justice and a key feature of the programme is the engagement of all students in school governance. This happens mainly through class and school meetings in which all students and staff participate. Meeting procedure is governed by community agreements that include things like; 'build not bomb', 'respect where people are at', 'don't judge, ask a question', 'seek equity in decision-making'. Meetings are of various kinds: a weekly whole-school meeting, separate advisory (class) meetings, and 10 minute meetings to settle immediate concerns. Children are shown ways of managing a meeting, of how to listen and talk at a meeting, how to reach consensus and tolerate alternative points of view. Children are empowered by having leadership roles at meetings and by seeing their ideas enacted in the governance and management of the school.

Bronwyn Hayward cites a report on citizenship education in which the idea is promoted that "the ethos, organisation, structures and daily practices of schools have considerable impact on the effectiveness of citizenship education" (2012, p.76). Brooklyn Free School's example of school meetings is a clear example of this, reminding us that we can enable children to be citizens-in-action simply through our organisational systems and structures. By engaging with school governance children can exercise all the skills of social action: defining and exploring problems that are real to them and have direct outcomes on their lives, exploring and testing solutions, engaging with adults in relationships of authority and power. The challenge for teachers and school leaders is to share power and to know that how we behave towards each other and our students is a powerful part of our curriculum - whether we acknowledge it or not. The power of Brooklyn Free School's model is to turn the actions of leading and governing a school into a tool for learning.

Improving life in the community - The Grove School, Toronto

The Grove School, like EAST, is an alternative school funded and operated within the public school system in Toronto. It is located on two floors of a large school building that it shares with another school in a lower socio-economic part of the downtown Toronto. In 2016 students from years 1-3 became involved in a STEM project focusing on mobility access in the community, inspired by observing people with limited mobility in the community. They surveyed disabled access to local shops and businesses and eventually raised funds to install a ramp into one of the popular local stores. In 2017 they are bringing their campaign back into their school, raising awareness about limited disabled access in this multi-storey building and lobbying for a gender-neutral toilet for students (which I was told will happen later this year).

This is an example of social action that is local, targeted and achievable. It comes from children noticing a need in their own neighbourhood and feeling empathetic to others - in this case people with limited mobility. It is a project that had a real outcome - providing a ramp into one shop - with potential to be scaled up to other and broader contexts. Interestingly, the students are attempting to bring this project from its original community setting back into the school.

Holding an election - Wakefield School

As part of completing the sabbatical leave project reported here we committed to exploring more closely the ideas of citizenship education and social action at Wakefield School. Staff undertook a professional learning day prior to the start of term three where they explored their own understanding of citizenship, democracy and social action learning, and planned a school-wide inquiry on elections using the New Zealand general election as a prompt (see Appendix Two).

Junior (Years 1-2) children first learned about negotiating choices and making decisions using democratic processes through studies of fairytales and then participated in the school election as voters and 'citizens' of our school. Year 3-6 students formed political parties, elected leaders and appointed 'ministers' with portfolios ranging from the environment to law and order. Each party developed a campaign with slogans, policies and a budget. We decided that the winning party would govern the school for a day, with a budget to implement their policies and responsibility to deliver on the promises they had made during the campaign. We used resources provided by the Electoral Commission. During the campaign the children had opportunities to promote their party's policies through a leaders' debate, posters, talks to classes and speeches at assembly. All voters (children and staff) had to enrol to vote and polling was conducted through a secret ballot using the First-Past-the-Post model. Vote-counting (by a teacher with a group of junior children) was shared live throughout the school on a Google document. The winning party experienced both the privileges and challenges of power, with the Prime Minister and cabinet working extremely hard to deliver their policies and manage the many diverse needs and voices of their constituents.

Feedback from students and parents was that this project generated high interest at home as well as school, with many conversations at homes about the 'real' general election campaign happening across the country. A few families reported that their children sought to rearrange home life along more democratic lines, with one six year old insisting that the family hold an

election for 'boss of the mornings' which became a critical learning point for the youngster when he was beaten to the job by his four year old sister.

As a social action inquiry the election project gave children valuable learning in how to conduct the affairs of a diverse group; persuading others' of your point of view, negotiating differing views, winning and losing with respect, communicating clearly and honestly, following through with commitments. The project offers potential for us to incorporate the children more into the ongoing management and governance of our school.

Locating other examples of social action learning in literature

During this project I have located through research and literature other examples of learning projects and inquiries that fit a social action model. Some important sources for these are:

1. Hipkins, R., Bolstad, R., Boyd, S. & McDowall, S. (2014). *Key Competencies for the Future.* Wellington, NZCER. Hipkins et al argue the importance of the key competencies in the New Zealand Curriculum and offer good examples of how to teach these through inquiries framed around 'wicked problems', including climate change, food security and diversity.
2. Wood, B., Taylor, R., Atkins, R. & Johnston, M. (2017). Creating active citizens: Interpreting, implementing, and assessing 'personal social action' in NCEA Social Studies. TLRI Research Project, Wellington, MOE. Wood et al explore social action inquiries within the senior secondary social studies curriculum, with useful reflections on the relative value of student-led and teacher-led inquiries, choosing topics that gain and hold interest, and managing a meaningful inquiry process in an over-crowded curriculum.
3. Brough, C. (2008). Student-Centred Curriculum Integration in Action. SET, 3, pp.9-14. Chris Brough is a leading exponent of student-led learning in New Zealand and this SET article is one of several she has published that explore co-constructed learning around themes. Not all the themes have directly social action outcomes - for example, this article discusses children organising their school camp - but Brough's writing is an excellent guide to the practicalities of running a student-led learning programme. She draws from the work of, among others, James Beane, a champion of student-centred curriculum integration, who advocates that the most powerful learning is drawn from children's own lives, that the theme becomes the primary source of curriculum and should not be deliberately shaped by teachers to accommodate traditional subjects, and that curriculum content knowledge is called upon to complete tasks or solve problems as and when required. Brough's choice of organising class camp as the theme in this article is to acknowledge the pressure on teachers to deliver prescribed topics and how, even in this situation, many of the principles and practices of student-led learning still apply.
4. http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/336592/student-volunteer-army-teams-up-with-primary-schools. This story from Radio New Zealand (6 August 2017) describes how the Student Volunteer Army, which grew out of the Christchurch earthquakes, intends to develop a primary school programme to encourage volunteering and community work. Students will be supported to set up and run community projects of their choice.

Strategies and tools for learning citizenship-in-action

How do teachers enable students to enter and explore the world of social action learning? What skills, competencies, values and attributes to we need to foster in ourselves and our teaching practice? What pitfalls await teachers starting out to use these techniques? The chart below captures several strategies and tools that are prominent in the literature of social action learning. The information in the chart is not definitive or even thorough; it is intended as a springboard for discussion and further study. Full citations of sources are provided in the references section.

I have included links to the key competencies in deference to the powerful work of Rose Hipkins and others in promoting the crucial role the competencies play, or should play, in a twenty-first century education that enables children to become the agents of learning and change in a rapidly evolving world.

The key competencies are:
ULST - Using language, symbols and texts
MS - Managing Self
RTO - Relating to Others
Th - Thinking
P&C - Participating and Contributing

Strategy/Tool	**Examples**	**Key Competencies**
Teacher talk that promotes student agency	Two extracts from Peter Johnston, *Opening Minds*, pp.42-44 (example with junior children); *Choice Words,* pp.49-52 (example with an older child). Johnston explores, using a wealth of examples of classroom practice, how teachers' talk can be a powerful model and learning tool for advancing skills and understandings about communication, power, democracy, empathy and citizenship among even very young children.	ULST
Student involvement in decision-making	**A.** Examples from the Scottish Curriculum *Education for Citizenship*, in Biesta, J., *Learning Democracy in School and Society*, pp.19-23. Two core themes: 1. "Young people learn most about citizenship by being active citizens". Schools should model the kind of society in which active citizenship is encouraged by 'providing all young people with opportunities to take responsibility and exercise choice'". 2. "The development of capability for citizenship	MS RTO Th

	'should be fostered in ways that motivate young people to be active and responsible members of their communities.'" P.23. Examples from the Scottish curriculum of effective practice in enabling students to exercise citizenship: - Their involvement in decision-making (in regard to both their learning and in student councils) - Importance of school ethos - Engagement with community and voluntary organisations - Attention to global issues - Emphasis on environmental issues **B.** Developing social agency in students. Giving children the opportunity to develop conflict-generated problem solving skills: in Hayward, B. *Children, Citizenship and Environment*, p.75. "Schools can nurture critical thinking and action 'by providing opportunities to practice debating real issues that involve deep dissent.'"	
Planning social action inquiries	Atkins, Taylor & Wood. (2016). Planning for critically-informed, active citizenship. *SET* 3, pp.15-22. Atkins and her colleagues research social action inquiries within the senior (year 12-13) social sciences curriculum. They focus on the "messy" phase of planning a social action inquiry and identify three domains that are important to successfully engaging students: ● Affective (emotional) domain. Students get 'hooked' through an empathetic response to the problem or issue. They learn to 'step into other people's shoes'. ● Cognitive domain. Students develop critical thinking skills to explore a problem or issue. They develop knowledge of the issue and learn to challenge their own and others' thinking. ● Practical domain. Students learn the skills of social action, including: advocacy, communication, political and democratic processes.	P&C Th ULST
Collaborative learning	Some really good ideas in Hipkins, R. et al. (2014). *Key Competencies for the Future*, pp.101-112 about how to enable children to work collectively. See especially p.108 about children's confusions around group work and some specific skills to foster better engagement with collective learning.	P&C RTO

Questioning	**A.** Wood, B. (2013). What is a Social Inquiry? *SET* 3, pp.20-28. Look especially at Table 1, p.26. Three kinds of questions: 1. Information-based 2. Values-based 3. Issues-based Using these different kinds of questions to achieve different goals: informational goals, and transformational and citizenship goals. **B.** Using questions to promote critical thinking within literacy development: Abbiss, J. *Critical Literacy, in SET, 3, 2016, pp.29-35.* Especially her lists of questions on p. 33 (Note: these are pitched at senior levels)	ULST Th
Learning goals, success criteria and feedback	**A.** Good examples in Fullan, M. & Langworthy, M. *A Rich Seam: How New Pedagogies Find Deep Learning*, 2014. Chapter 2, pp.21-29, using 'deep learning' tasks to "develop new knowledge through the integration of prior knowledge, with ideas, information and concepts" (p. 23). **B.** Hattie, J. *Visible Learning*. Good summary of Learning Goals on pp.164-165; and on feedback, pp.173-177. See especially the four levels of feedback on p.177.	RTO Th MS
Digital Tools	See discussion in Fullan, M. & Langworthy, M. *A Rich Seam: How New Pedagogies Find Deep Learning*, 2014. Chapter 3, pp.30-36.	ULST Th RTO
Engagement with community	**A.** How community involvement can foster social agency among students is discussed in Hayward, B. (2012). *Children, Citizenship and Environment*, pp.78-79, and also see community mapping exercise as a way of developing citizenship identity on pp.88-92. **B.** ERO *Educationally Powerful Connections with Parents and Whanau*, esp. pp.34-38.	P&C RTO

Linear and Cyclical inquiries

One of the questions I set out to answer in this project was how do we stop our inquiry 'cycles' from always being linear? As I noted in the introduction, our efforts to develop a co-constructed curriculum with high levels of student engagement and deep learning embedded in real-life problems depend upon children and teachers having time to explore topics in depth, to return to a problem or topic several, or many, times, to deepen and broaden their knowledge and

understanding. Sally Boyd and Rose Hipkins, in an excellent pair of SET magazine articles (2012, 2013) that explore issues around student inquiry and curriculum integration, touch on the problem: "what most (inquiry) models have in common is that learning is viewed as a process with different stages or steps that students are guided through. Some are presented as a circular process that tends to be used once (and therefore is essentially linear)" (2012, p.16). From my reading, my conversations with teachers and academics and my visits to schools during this project I have found little, if any, evidence that inquiry learning anywhere is truly cyclical in the sense that it allows the learner to explore a topic by going around the inquiry process more than once. Even in schools where the curriculum is conceived in more holistic ways, such as EAST School in Toronto or the Brooklyn Free School, student inquiries appeared to be conducted once around the cycle. When I reflect on it, the work we are doing at Wakefield School to make inquiry cycles truly cyclical seems to be as good as any. For example, the nude food lunchboxes inquiry allowed children to grapple with a problem (the amount of litter they were generating through their lunches) in considerable depth, to hone their thinking and craft their solutions through an investigative process, to adjust the scale of the intervention as they gained confidence in their actions. Nevertheless, even this example falls some way short of a truly iterative approach, and doesn't reflect the way a lot of our inquiry learning happens.

My experience has led me to think I am asking the wrong question, or at least that my thinking about inquiry cycles is too limited. If nobody seems to be working out how to go around an inquiry cycle more than once perhaps it isn't important? Or perhaps learning is cyclical but not in ways that I have considered? Looking at the problem in a different way leads to a few observations that may be helpful.

Time

A considerable influence on managing inquiry projects is the tyranny of time. The main reason inquiry topics, like all learning projects, finish is because teachers are compelled to move on to the next thing. Increasingly the curriculum appears to be diced up into small, exclusive bites that have few connections with each other. And it's not just the curriculum; we design our learning day around lessons or periods, and our learning year around weeks and terms that become boundaries to learning. Ask any teacher why they don't allow more time for a topic and they will tell you that there are too many competing priorities, too many achievement objectives, too many extra-curricular activities or 'bolt-ons' to the core curriculum.

How can we create more time to allow our students to explore learning in depth? A few things we strive to do at Wakefield School are:

- Value deeper learning. If we make a commitment to allow children and teachers to explore learning then we have a basis on which to make other decisions around how we use our time. Valuing this way of learning means not just convincing ourselves that it is worth doing, but also convincing the board of trustees and our community. This can only be done through patient conversations and evidence that deeper learning leads to better engagement, progress and achievement: and that takes time!
- Get a grip on the curriculum. The first thing is for teachers to understand that the New Zealand Curriculum does not expect them to teach every achievement objective: it is

sufficient to cover the curriculum strands at each level (MOE, 2007, p.38). Considering that each level of the NZC equates to approximately two years of schooling then coverage becomes less daunting. Allow that a single inquiry topic can encompass several strands reduces the problem even further. At Wakefield School we have created a simple matrix that allows teachers and students to track curriculum coverage. Teachers simply cut and paste strands they have covered into a tracking document, allowing them to see at a glance what areas still need to be covered. We engage students in this process so they too have an investment in covering the curriculum, leading to intelligent choices about which interests, topics and problems they focus on. An example of the tracking document is at the link below:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/13gnTv2D1ehxZn8JsU6t6pqc6O_i1DrY3m4e15e7tSWY/edit#gid=1645987051

- Make real choices. In schools we often feel compelled to take on every bright idea that crosses our doorstep or inbox. It is the job of school leaders to say 'no' to some of the initiatives and programmes that can over-balance our curriculum. This is easier to do when we have a strong vision and clear local curriculum, negotiated among teachers, students, parents and community. To the extent that we remain self-managing schools we should have confidence that we can set our own priorities and manage our learning programme as we choose.

Knowledge and key competencies

Perhaps I misunderstand the nature of cyclical inquiry because I am viewing it through an outdated paradigm that places knowledge at the centre of learning. Much has been written about the place of knowledge in 21st century learning (see, for example, Gilbert, 2005), particularly about the fluid and subjective nature of knowledge in a world soaked in information and rapidly changing technologies. We are told (and I find it a compelling argument) that our role as teachers and schools is to equip our students with the skills and competencies that enable them to acquire knowledge as and when they need it throughout their journey as 'lifelong learners'. From this point of view the key competencies take on a greater significance in learning programmes, and perhaps this is where truly cyclical learning happens.

To take our election inquiry described above as an example; our children will not get a second go around the content of that inquiry for quite some time, but they will revisit and practise many of the competencies that were the focus of the election inquiry in their next and subsequent inquiries. The skills and attributes embedded in the key competencies are relevant to most learning experiences in a programme that values student-led learning and inquiry methods: children will always be expected to learn with others, to think critically, to link their learning to wider goals and outcomes, to contribute toward solving a shared challenge, to use language, symbols and texts with ever-increasing confidence and skill.

So perhaps the answer to the conundrum of cyclical inquiry is to make our objective the process and not the content of learning.

Roles of teacher and student

The balance between teacher-led and student-led learning is another element that can hinder or promote cyclical inquiry. Assuming that through inquiry learning our children will discover, practise and master the key competencies, an important part of that process must be for the teacher to gradually step aside and allow children to be independent learners. In doing so the teacher's role becomes at once less 'busy', as their role as the purveyor of knowledge diminishes, and more responsive as they tune in to the child's readiness to 'go it alone.' Reducing the busy-ness of the teacher's role potentially enables teachers to make better use of their time, while having learners who are increasingly independent allows cyclical inquiry to become self-managing.

Bronwyn Wood's work with senior social science students captures some of the strengths and risks of social action inquiry learning from both teacher-led and student-led perspectives.

Teacher-led vs. student-led social action inquiry approaches and implications

	Teacher-led structured inquiry	**Teacher-guided inquiry**	**Open student-led inquiry**
Knowledge	High cognitive levels Strong social issue knowledge	Generally good levels of knowledge. Balance between guidance/freedom a juggle for teachers	Patchy and, at times, weak levels of knowledge about social issue and an aligned social action

Engagement	Lower levels of engagement from some students. Some concerns about coercion	Some restrictions on students' ideas but some students felt more supported by greater discussion of options	Generally high levels engagement but some disillusionment if a selected action proved to be weak

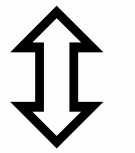
(Wood et al, 2017)

From the information in the table teacher-guided inquiry appears to offer the best outcome for instilling knowledge and promoting engagement. The art of guiding an inquiry is a challenging one however, and requires the teacher to have excellent understanding of her students, to be perceptive and nimble in her judgements of when to step forward and when to let go, and to be tolerant of error and failure. In themselves these are all key competencies that benefit students when modelled by their teachers, but they require a very different mindset - and skillset - than has traditionally been expected from teachers.

In my view the strongest approach to teaching social action inquiry (and almost anything else) is a mixed model that allows the full range of approaches from teacher-led to student-led learning. The table below is how we define this approach at Wakefield School.

Co-constructed learning means teachers and students sometimes take on different roles in different modes of learning:

Mode	**Lead Role**	**Response Role**	
Direct Instruction	Teacher explicitly instructs	Learners follow instruction	
Supported Instruction	Teacher models and provides 'scaffolds'	Learners apply the model	
Supported Acquisition	Learners initiate action and seek feedback to guide direction	Teacher gives formative feedback: nudges, prompts, questions, challenges	

Autonomous Acquisition	Learners initiate, negotiate, choose, direct, evaluate	Teacher facilitates	

The arrow in the right hand column illustrates that the learner and teacher move constantly between the various modes, often within a single lesson or at multiple times during lessons depending on the challenge, the learner, the knowledge and the skills. Autonomous Acquisition is not the inevitable, or necessarily even the desired, outcome at all times. Ultimately we want our children to become independent lifelong learners, but that doesn't mean they will always learn autonomously: being independent of the teacher doesn't mean there will not be others who take on the role of guiding an individual's learning, be they peers, mentors or a more experienced colleague.

Conclusion

The sabbatical project described in this report attempted to answer some questions relating to social action outcomes for inquiry learning. I feel that what started out as a quest for ways in which to 'do' social action in schools turned into a more introspective study of citizenship and democratic learning. This has been a valuable journey for me; it has helped me to understand better some of the important concepts we are grappling with at Wakefield School as we respond to the challenge of making education more fit for purpose in today's - and tomorrow's - world; it has enriched my networks of like-minded educators; it has enabled me to guide our vision a step or two further in the direction we think is purposeful. I hope that readers of this report find some value in it for their own learning.

Peter Verstappen
October 2017

Appendix One. Review of Courageous Voices, EAST School, Toronto

"**Life is Now!"**

Courageous Voices at Metropolitan Community Church
East Alternative School of Toronto
3 May 2017

If studying heroism points us towards our own values then perhaps the most unexpected and moving part of this heartfelt performance came right at the end as each young performer came forward and delivered a single, final statement – of hope, commitment, passion, defiance. It took me a few moments to realize the authors of these statements were themselves, the 30 or so grade 8 students who had enthralled us for nearly two hours with the words of their heroes. To finish the show with their own wisdom clinches it for me as a superb act, and acclamation, of their learning.

Courageous Voices weaves the narratives of 27 heroes - civil rights activists, environmental warriors, survivors of holocausts and terrorism, pioneers of LGBT rights – in a mesmerizing blend of voice and movement. The script, using just the heroes' own words, cleverly plucks the common messages from multiple voices, so the heroes engage in swirling conversations across time and space: Steve Biko, Sojouner Truth and Mavis Staples declaim the fight for freedom from racism; Ishmael Beah, Emmanuel Jal and Mariatu Kamara signpost journeys of forgiveness and hope from the horrors of war and terror. This is clever, poignant and profoundly moving. The trick is clearly in choosing heroes who speak to us, whose message finds a place in our own hearts, but the power of the performance springs from excellent acting. These young performers work really well together; their cues are sharp, they pick up each other's energy and pass it around with selfless ease, they move with purpose and appear totally in command of their craft.

The music deserves mention. I'm told there aren't too many real singers in this group, but you could have fooled me; their voices blend with ease, the songs are well pitched and smoothly supported by nicely restrained guitar work, allowing the occasional solo voice to illuminate a phrase.

I've seen a lot of middle school theatre but nothing like this. Thank you EAST school's grade 8 students for bringing your heroes' stories to our notice with your fabulous production. As one of your heroes said, "freedom is not a gift from heaven." Clearly you have absorbed that message, you know that freedom is earned – in Courageous Voices you're earning it.

Peter Verstappen

Appendix Two: Resources for staff professional learning activities on citizenship

Activity One: What's a 'Citizen'? Creating a community map

(Begin by finding definitions of 'citizen' and 'citizenship')

Citizenship is inextricably bound with community. Citizens cannot exist in isolation, they are always defined as members of a community.

In a group, use a digital tool (Prezi or similar) or a large sheet of paper to create a community map to explain how we are citizens of Wakefield School. Use these questions and prompts to shape your map:

- "I am a citizen of Wakefield School". "Wakefield School is my community".
- What happens at Wakefield School? Why can we call it a community?
- What do I do to contribute to Wakefield School being a community?
- What rights and duties do I have as a member of the Wakefield School community?

You may also consider these questions:

- Who makes the rules in this community? Do I have a part in making rules?
- What issues are in this community that I would like to have a say about?

Consider how you could use this activity with your students.
Consider how you could use this activity in relation to Wakefield village or another community.

(Source: Hayward, B., 2012. *Children, Citizenship and Environment*, Focus Group Prompts, p.159. By permission of the author).

Activity Two: Defining "citizens-in-action"

Collect your responses to these two questions in a shared doc or on paper

1. What is 'citizenship?
    - Is citizenship different for different people?
    - Does it differ from context to context? (place, time)
    - Is it the same thing for me as for the children I teach?
    - What does (and could) 'citizenship' mean to a five year old, an eight year old, a ten year old?

Consider this: What does (and could) 'citizenship' mean to a five year old, an eight year old, a ten year old?

2. What is 'action'?
    - How do I 'be' a citizen? What actions, competencies, mindsets comprise my citizenship?
    - What expectations do I have of children as citizens-in-action? How do these expectations differ with children of different ages?
    - What is a valid and useful 'action' from an inquiry learning process? (Assuming there are many more actions than, say, planting trees or cleaning up the local stream, If we could list all the actions we consider valid and useful what would be on the list?).

Some other key concepts
(How do you define these?)

- Civics Education
- Community
- Social action
- Student agency
- Democratic learning

Activity Three: Planning an inquiry for citizenship and social action

Inquiry Subject:	
Rationale: *(Why this subject? How will it promote citizenship and social action outcomes?)*	
Year Level(s):	Curriculum Level:

PART ONE: OBJECTIVES *(define and describe the inquiry)*	
Links to NZC: *Social Science Achievement Objectives*	*How might these AOs happen in this inquiry?*
<u>Level One</u>: Understand how belonging to groups is important for people Understand that people have different roles and responsibilities as part of their participation in groups.	
<u>Level Two:</u> Understand that people have social, cultural and economic roles, rights and responsibilities Understand how people make significant contributions to New Zealand's society.	
<u>Level Three</u>: Understand how groups make and implement rules and laws Understand how people make decisions about access to and use of resources.	

Links to Wakefield School's Curriculum	
1. Inquiry Big Idea: **Who Am I?**	*How might these objectives be supported in this inquiry?*
Years 1-3: Me and My World "Children develop a sense of belonging to their family, community and environment. They develop an awareness of their individuality and cultural identity, and an appreciation of diversity".	
Years 4-6: Rights & Responsibilities "Children learn how societies work and how people can participate as critical, active, informed and responsible citizens. They develop a way of understanding the interrelationships that exist between people and society".	
2. Co-constructed Learning	*How might these objectives be supported in this inquiry?*
Children learn to participate effectively in democracy through citizenship and civics education in authentic contexts. Children have agency, for example, through shared decision-making processes. Children learn through leadership.	

PART TWO: QUESTIONS *(initiate, guide and enrich the inquiry)*	
Information-based questions: *Questions that improve our factual, historical and conceptual knowledge of the subject. Include lower-level fact-finding questions and higher-level questions to enable generalising and drawing conclusions.* I.e. what do we need to KNOW?	
Values-based questions: *Questions that promote social and personal significance and relevance of the subject. Questions that connect the children with the 'emotional terrain' around the subject.* I.e. WHY is this issue/topic important to us/others?	
Citizenship-based questions: *Questions that probe the issues around the subject and explore ways of solving problems* I.e. HOW can we respond to this issue? What do we need to protect? Preserve? Or change?	

PART THREE: ACTIVITIES *(discover, explore and make meaning of the inquiry)*	
Direct Instruction: *Teacher explicitly instructs. Learners follow instruction.*	
Supported Instruction: *Teacher models and scaffolds learning. Learners apply the model.*	
Supported Acquisition: *Learners initiate activities and seek feedback to guide their direction. Teacher gives formative feedback: nudges, prompts, questions, challenges.*	
Autonomous Acquisition: *Learners, initiate activities, negotiate, choose, direct and evaluate. Teacher facilitates and gives summative feedback.*	

PART FOUR: ACTIONS *(So what? Now what?)* *(Consider actions from Wood's categories: fundraising, educating ourselves and others, raising awareness, and advocacy and direct lobbying. Also consider other actions such as; taking direct action, improving environments and habitats, creating a product or resource)*	
Category	Actions - consider what are the short-term? Long-term consequences of our actions?

PART FIVE: EVALUATION AND RE-ITERATION *(assess the learning, draw conclusions, consider next steps)* *How effective has the learning been against the objectives and outcomes? What other outcomes have been learned along the way? How can the inquiry continue to spiral?)*		
Objective/Outcome	Evidence of learning	Comment
Future actions to continue the spiral of inquiry		

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