

# Module 1 – Classroom Practice

## Outcomes

At the completion of this module, you will be able to:

- conceive of the classroom as a democratic place in which students can actively participate in creating the context of their learning environment
- determine the values, decision-making processes and climate of a democratic classroom
- create links between students' classroom participation and civics and citizenship knowledge and skills.

## Purpose

Ensuring that students develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions to participate in their communities is the central goal of the civics and citizenship education program. One such community is the classroom, where students can assist in establishing the context of their learning environment, and be charged with the responsibility of ensuring that it is a democratic space in which all are empowered to contribute to the learning experience.

Valuing and providing opportunities for active, democratic participation in the classroom assists students in making connections between their participation and their understanding of democratic processes. It also assists with the socialisation of students into an ethic of cooperation, encourages respect and gives them responsibility for their learning.

Creating a democratic environment in the classroom provides opportunities for students to enhance and apply their understanding of civics and citizenship values. Civics and citizenship values are the values that are associated with Australian democratic life, its institutions and democratic participation, and are explored in detail in this module. Throughout this module, you will be encouraged to reflect on how your classroom practice and program equips students with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to participate fully – now and in the future – as active and informed members of their communities.

## Aims

The aims of the module are to:

- familiarise you with the knowledge, skills and dispositions for successful civics and citizenship participation
- assist you in identifying the civics and citizenship values that can be fostered in classroom contexts
- engage you in interrogating case studies of good civics and citizenship practice in which students participated in the classroom
- encourage you to draw conclusions from your learning experience in this module for your own classroom practice
- empower you to create a democratic classroom in which students can participate.

## Structure and content

This module identifies the civics and citizenship education outcomes that students are able to achieve in the classroom, and contains case studies of teacher classroom practice in civics and citizenship education. You will be asked to work through three case studies, and reflect on how you would establish and maintain a democratic classroom that values, supports and provides opportunities for student participation in decision making.



The learning model outlined in the introduction will facilitate your engagement with this module by constructing the learning experience for you. At key points, you will be asked to engage with the content of a section by referring to the learning model. Designated sections (\*) of the learning model will assist you in constructing your own program for students' civics and citizenship participation in the classroom. Through your engagement with the learning model you will be required to consider the reasons for student participation in the classroom, to work through three case studies in which teachers created opportunities for student civic and citizenship participation, to reflect on your approach and the opportunities you provide for student participation in classroom decision making, and to develop ways of assessing that participation.

The case studies focus on:

- using play to develop participatory knowledge, skills and dispositions
- applying parliamentary processes to classroom decision making
- building a harmonious learning environment through understanding and exercising civics and citizenship values.

In your consideration of the three case studies, you will be asked to reflect on how you would:

- identify opportunities for student participation in the classroom
- prepare students for taking responsibility for democratising their learning environment
- engage students in the decision-making processes that facilitate their participation in the classroom
- ensure that civics and citizenship values are explicit in your teaching and learning environment.

## Civics and citizenship education focus

This module emphasises civics and citizenship education knowledge, skills and dispositions that can be fostered in the classroom, specifically:

- engaging with values that are important to Australian democracy and social cohesion and considering ways in which they can be enacted by individuals or groups to achieve common goals
- developing knowledge and skills in collective decision making, informed action and working together for the common good to support or counter the behaviours and/or actions of individuals or groups
- defining and exercising personal and shared rights and responsibilities associated with being a citizen within a classroom context
- exercising a responsibility for establishing fair processes and procedures for participation and group decision making
- developing an awareness of how values underpin the processes and procedures for participation
- fostering a willingness to participate through agreed processes and procedures
- developing a propensity to take action to bring about positive change
- building a capacity for leadership in the decision-making process
- having an awareness of self-held beliefs and values, and how these are informed, challenged and altered by interactions with others.

## Reflect

Before proceeding further, reflect on current strengths, areas for development, questions that you may have, and ideas in terms of the knowledge, skills and dispositions required to provide a learning environment that values and supports student participation in classroom decision making.

You may wish to begin a reflective journal or create a 'parking lot', which can be added to as you engage with this and other modules

Reflective journals are useful learning tools. You can use your journal to record, illustrate or challenge ideas within the professional learning package.

A parking lot is a graphic organiser that can be used to record your strengths, questions, areas for development and ideas.



## Democratic classroom

**Although we teach about democracy, we rarely practice it in our schools and classrooms. ... Creating caring classrooms and supportive schools will improve opportunities for students to become citizens rather than tourists. ... Tourists simply pass through without involvement, commitment or belonging. ... In places where people respect them and care about them as individuals, students can learn to become informed and involved members of our democratic society.**

H Jerome Freiberg, educator and author (1996)

Classrooms are some of the most frequently visited communities, and the places where students spend a great deal, if not most, of their time. They are places where students ought to feel safe and confident to engage in the learning experience; but they also need to be environments for which students can take responsibility. Having students take responsibility for their learning environment entails fostering in them the civics and citizenship skills and dispositions for participation, for decision making and leadership, and inviting them to engage with their values and those of others in their immediate community. This creates purposeful, authentic learning opportunities

for students, where their participation has real implications for their environment, and clear connections to their values.

Empowering students to make classrooms democratic places for learning engages them in making choices about their environments, in weighing-up competing demands and priorities, and designing processes by which conflicting points of view and interests might be transformed into an agreed, collective purpose. The skills that students develop in managing classroom behaviour, negotiating the curriculum, establishing learning goals and deciding on assessment criteria are thus relevant to the workplace and their communities beyond the school.

When students take responsibility for creating their learning environment, they are bringing their values to bear on the classroom – their community. In a democratic classroom, they are making decisions and designing decision-making processes that simultaneously reflect their values as individuals, engage the values of participation, and promote the values of the community they seek to create or maintain. The values of the individual, of participation and community are the three dimensions of civics and citizenship values.

# Civics and Citizenship Values

Democratic classrooms provide students with opportunities to understand and apply democratic processes through explicit teaching, modelling and exercising the three dimensions of civics and citizenship values – the values of participation, the values of the individual and the values of the community.

## Values of the individual

Students are aware of their own values, behave morally and ethically towards others, and use their values to inform their positions on issues and in choosing solutions to problems.

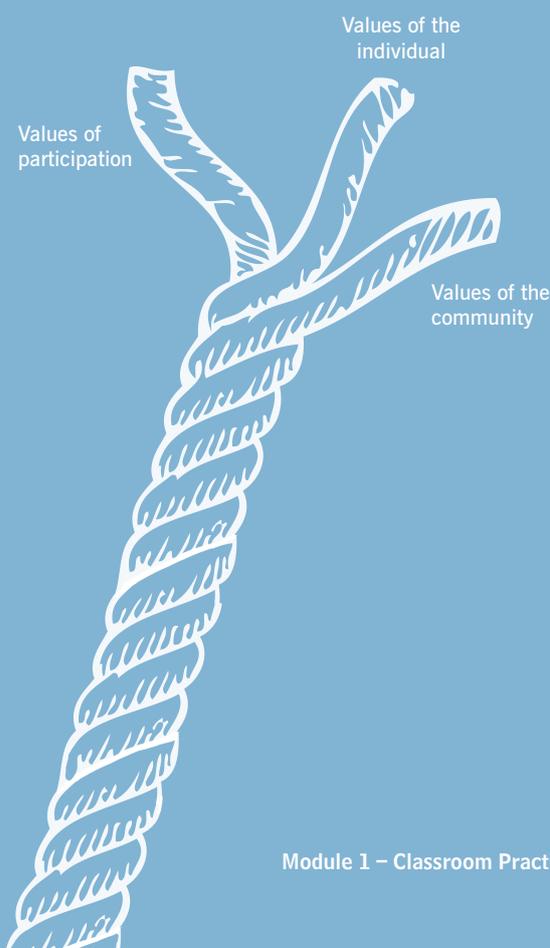
They understand that their values can inform their actions, and that they might be challenged by the values of others, or that they sometimes might have to choose between competing values. In decision-making contexts they act with integrity, honesty, and compassion, have respect for the views of others, and critically assess group decisions against their values and the common good. Students acknowledge the positive qualities in others that they admire and wish to develop further in themselves.

## Values of participation

Students view themselves as part of a classroom community and, as such, view any problems or issues, at least in part, to be their own which to help resolve. They have the motivation and seek the knowledge and skills to make a difference and take action to positively influence the classroom environment. They engage with the responsibility of shared decision making, and demonstrate values such as perseverance, cooperation, inclusion and fairness in the interests of the common good or in the pursuit of justice and equality for a single individual.

## Values of the community

Students are actively involved in creating the kind of classroom community to which they wish to belong and contribute. They are aware that a community is based on shared understandings of agreed values and principles, and collectively take responsibility for maintaining those values and principles, through their behaviour as a group and towards each other. With their teacher, they co-establish classroom rights, responsibilities, roles and expectations which affirm the values of their community, and ensure that their learning environment provides opportunities for all and is free from negative peer pressure and unnecessary distractions. They collectively acknowledge and celebrate the efforts and successes of individuals and the class.



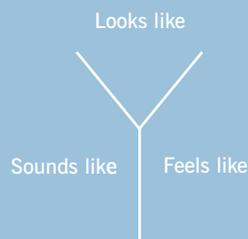
## Reflect

Use a Y-chart to record the key characteristics of a democratic classroom.

- What does it look like?  
How might the students behave?
- What does it sound like?  
How might the students interact?
- What does it feel like?  
What might be the students' attitudes?

Draw a large Y on a piece of paper, or in your reflective journal if you are keeping one, and label it as shown. Record your responses. Use a highlighter to identify the student behaviours, interactions and attitudes that are currently apparent in your classroom.

A Y-chart is a graphic organiser that assists the user in recording what might be seen, heard and felt.



## Reflect/Collaborate

If you are undertaking a collegial learning activity, use a think-pair-share activity to complete the following tasks.

- Identify the knowledge, skills and dispositions listed in the civics and citizenship education focus (page 7) that can be addressed within the context of a democratic classroom. Share your responses with your colleagues.
- Brainstorm a list of civics and citizenship values that are important to Australian democracy; for example, fairness, equality, responsibility and integrity. Use your list to annotate the civics and citizenship values that are evident in the democratic classroom. Share your annotations with your colleagues.

- Classify the values on your list into the three dimensions – individual, participation and community. Add to each dimension if needed. Are there any overlapping values? What conclusions can you draw from this list?

A think-pair-share activity enables learners to 'think' first, then to 'pair' with another learner to exchange ideas. The pair then presents to the group, allowing diverse ideas to be collated.

## \*Reflect/Connect

View your state or territory's curriculum documents related to civics and citizenship education. Identify the sections that are relevant to developing students' knowledge, skills and dispositions for participation. Use different colours to highlight connections that you can make between the curriculum documents and each of the three dimensions of civics and citizenship values for a democratic classroom – the values of participation, the values of the individual and the values of the community.

Consider the following questions. If you are using a reflective journal, record your responses.

- Thinking about your state or territory's curriculum documents, what opportunities could a democratic classroom provide for your students to learn about and apply civics and citizenship values?
- How does your current practice and program support students to exercise the kind of civics and citizenship values that underpin the democratic classroom?
- How might your students use what they are learning and the skills and dispositions that they are developing one year from now? Five years from now? Ten years from now?

## Case studies

One of the challenges for civics and citizenship education is making it real for students – that things really do matter. One of the best ways of beginning to approach this is to demonstrate democracy in the classroom. One of the challenges for teachers is to devise and implement ways of creating democratic communities on a daily basis.

Lucas Walsh, Faculty of Education,  
Monash University (2001)

Each case study provides a different motivation for fostering students' participation in the classroom, but they all focus on empowering students to make a difference in their classroom and using effective and inclusive pedagogical strategies to achieve that outcome. In all of the case studies, teachers are attempting, implicitly or explicitly, to make the connection between the processes of participation and the civics and citizenship values that they are seeking to affirm in students and the classroom.

### Reflect/Collaborate

Referring to the three dimensions of civics and citizenship values for a democratic classroom (page 9), use a highlighter to identify the values of participation, the individual and the community being developed in each of the three case studies below. If you are undertaking a collegial learning activity, consider dividing up this task by focusing on one of the following and sharing your findings:

- the civics and citizenship values of participation, the individual and the community evident in a single case study
- the civics and citizenship values of participation, the individual, or the community across the three case studies.

### Case study 1

#### (T-6 school in a rural area outside of Darwin, Northern Territory)

Case study 1 is a Year 5/6 class from a school that has a population of 350 students. The school's values include accepting responsibility and respect for self and others.

#### Using play to develop participatory knowledge, skills and dispositions

The context for learning about civics and citizenship values was based on a fictitious township that was once a thriving community but was fast approaching 'ghost town' status. The townspeople needed to make crucial decisions regarding the future social, political, economic and industrial direction of the town.

In their roles as townspeople, the students worked in cooperative small groups to research government operations, political systems, town planning, the development of rules and laws and the values required to actively participate in civic life. They also worked with a series of guest speakers to inform their thinking including representatives from local government, emergency services, the defence force and wildlife rescue. This approach to teaching and learning was typical of the teacher's regular practice. In previous years, the teacher had students set up their own community as part of an Earn and Learn program.

The role-plays provided students with opportunities to gain experience in decision-making processes that challenged them to question, resolve conflicts and explore the concepts of equity and justice. It also provided the students with opportunities to explore how decision makers need to balance the needs of the majority with the needs of minority groups. The knowledge and skills acquired enabled students to apply their understanding to the roles, rights and responsibilities of 'classroom citizens'. In everyday situations, the students understood and could articulate how decisions, choices, opportunities and issues of conflict affected them and their classmates.

The role-plays and subsequent application to daily classroom experiences also assisted students in addressing key framing questions from the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework's EsseNTial Learnings, specifically:

- Who am I and where am I going? (inner learner)
- What is possible? (creative learner)
- How do I connect with and relate to others? (collaborative learner)
- How can I make a useful difference? (constructive learner).

## Case study 2

### (8–12 school in the Pilbara region, northern Western Australia)

Case study 2 is a Year 9 class at a senior high school. The school has approximately 700 students representing around sixty different cultural groups. Many students come from homes where English is their second language. Indigenous students make up nearly 40 per cent of the school's student population. The school's motto reflects its core values of care, courtesy, respect and responsibility.

#### The classroom parliament

As part of a study of the parliamentary process and the senate committee system, the Year 9 class participated in a series of role-plays. To prepare for the event, the students brainstormed topics that were relevant to them, and which they thought would be interesting to research and debate in their classroom parliament. The teacher reported that students were generally willing to participate in classroom activities such as these although faculty-based pressure to 'get through the curriculum' came at the expense of providing students with opportunities to be involved in democratic processes beyond that of classroom parliamentary role-plays.

After some initial class work, the students worked in groups to develop a script and allocated various roles such as prime minister, leader of the opposition and independent members of parliament. Roles such as the whip and speaker of the House of Representatives were

also delegated. The classroom furniture was arranged to resemble the House of Representatives. An issue that the students selected was then debated. The key understandings that were derived from the Western Australian Outcomes and Standards Framework – Natural and Social Systems and Active Citizenship – for the classroom parliament included:

- individuals' rights and responsibilities as active citizens within a civil society
- formal processes of democracy have political, legal and civic components
- the Constitution protects civic components of a democracy, which provides a voice for people and possible collective action.

The teacher reported that the students gained an understanding of how important individuals are to Australia's democratic process. The students understood that being a responsible citizen in Australia means that they have a say on how Australia is run and, as individuals, they had the right to voice their opinions.

The positive feedback from students prompted the teacher to hold regular classroom parliamentary sessions that focused on making decisions about classroom-based issues. The continuing nature of the classroom parliament provided an ongoing forum where students' decisions were valued and where the needs of the group were addressed. The teacher saw this as an important departure from previous years when the classroom parliament was simply a one-off event that involved role-play. The students were now empowered with real decision-making roles about the sorts of things that mattered to and affected them. The teacher noted that there was a heightened sense of classroom cohesion and respect between students. The teacher put this down to the fact that students had regular opportunities to develop their participatory skills and continually revisited the knowledge they had gained about the democratic process.

A trip to Canberra, partially funded through the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER), enabled students to see the federal parliamentary process in action and to make important connections between the Parliament of Australia and their classroom parliament with regard to the way decisions are made.

## Case study 3

### (7–12 school in the north-western suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria)

Case study 3 is a Year 8 class at a secondary school on the urban fringe of Melbourne. The school has approximately 600 students. The school's mission is to provide experiences that promote academic excellence and personal growth. Its values include respect, responsibility, inclusion and participation.

#### Building a harmonious learning environment

The learning environment of the Year 8 Humanities class was far from harmonious in the beginning. Students were involved in physical and verbal fights and failed to accept each other for their differences. The majority of students had academic abilities that ranged from average to high performing. The class also had students with intellectual disabilities and physical impairments. The teacher reported that there was a 'tradition' of making few contributions to classroom activities. The behaviour of the Year 8 class was out of step with the school's values. The teacher acknowledged that the teaching of civics and citizenship had been relegated to a three-week unit of work where the students studied Australian democracy and its civic institutions. The unit was content focused and there were limited opportunities for students to practise the democratic processes they had been studying and participate in classroom-based decision making. The teacher decided to revisit civics and citizenship and focus on teaching and modelling civics and citizenship values and the qualities of good citizens in a democratic society.

In order to understand the qualities of good citizens and the civics and citizenship values that good citizens exercise, the teacher involved the students in some preliminary discussions and class work about what a democracy was and the values that underpin it. The local member was invited to talk to students about the importance of civics and citizenship values to Australia's democracy.

The students then brainstormed a list of civics and citizenship values that they believed to be important for a democratic society and used the school's values as a point of reference. In groups of three, the students used an

X-chart to unpack the values they had listed. For each quadrant of the X-chart, the students were asked to record:

- What does the civic value look like in daily life?
- What does civic value sound like in daily life?
- How does the civic value feel like in daily life?
- What practical examples of the civic value can be applied in the classroom?

The students were then provided with an opportunity to contribute responses to the X-charts created by other groups. A digital camera, markers and coloured paper were used to create a display of civics and citizenship values in action within the classroom. The posters were hung up around the room in which students had the majority of their classes.

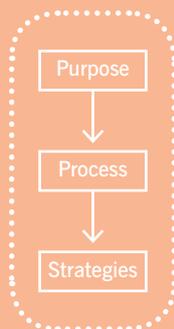
The posters were then used to create a class constitution that detailed the rights and responsibilities of class members – including the teacher – in the classroom, in the school and in the community. The students felt a great deal of ownership for their constitution and kept one another accountable for the rights and responsibilities they had established. The teacher used 20 minutes of a double period once a fortnight to check on how the constitution was working and that student behaviour remained aligned to the core civics and citizenship values that they had identified.

The teacher noted a change in the classroom culture, in particular the depth of thought and level of classroom participation in decision making. Previously disengaged and apathetic students were now enthusiastic, eager to contribute to classroom discussions and sought to encourage and support students with particular learning needs. The teacher also noted a positive change in the level of maturity displayed by students, which gave the teacher the confidence to provide students with opportunities to make decisions about curriculum content to be covered, how work was to be presented and to contribute to assessment criteria. The students shared what they had learnt with their friends in other classes who were keen to establish their own classroom constitutions.

## Reflect

For each case study, reflect on the purpose (aim or goal), the process (program or series of structured related activities or tasks) and the strategies (actions or steps) the teacher used for creating democratic spaces in the classroom. If you are using a reflective journal, record your responses to the following questions.

- **Purpose:** What was the purpose of establishing a democratic space in the classroom? Why might the teacher have decided on this as the purpose?
- **Process:** What process was selected as the vehicle for fulfilling the purpose? Why might the teacher have chosen that process as the vehicle?
- **Strategies:** What strategies were employed to support the process? Why might the teacher have selected those strategies?



## Reflect/Collaborate

Use de Bono's six thinking hats to evaluate the three case studies from a range of perspectives. If you are undertaking this task as a collegial learning activity, consider dividing up the task by focusing on one of the following and sharing your responses:

- a single case study from the perspective of each of the six thinking hats
- the perspective of one or two thinking hats in relation to the three case studies.

### The facts (White hat):

- What was achieved in terms of participatory knowledge, skills and dispositions?
- How were civics and citizenship values (individual, community and participation) demonstrated?

### Feelings/Beliefs (Red hat):

- How did the attitudes of teachers and students change over time? What caused the change?
- What might be the beliefs about civics and citizenship education held by the teachers?

### Benefits (Yellow hat):

- How are the students being prepared for their current lives as family, community and classroom members?
- How are they being prepared for their future lives?

### Caution (Black hat):

- What concerns might the teachers have initially had for working in this way?
- What obstacles or barriers might the teachers have faced?

### Creativity (Green hat):

- How might the teachers have overcome possible obstacles or barriers?
- What other programs for schools could have achieved similar results?

### Organising (Blue hat):

- What steps might the teachers have taken in planning for the classes?
- How could the teachers extend their classroom programs further?

The six thinking hats is a thinking and reflective tool that assists the user in viewing a topic or issue from a range of perspectives. The tool was created by Edward de Bono.

## Drawing conclusions

You now have the opportunity to relate your experiences with the three case studies to your classroom context. The following tasks will assist you in applying what you have learnt from the case studies so that you are better placed to establish and maintain a democratic classroom. You will engage in a comparison of your classroom practice with the classroom practices in the case studies, develop an appreciation for how the teachers in the case studies achieved their success and overcame challenges, and how you can apply or adapt their strategies based on your classroom context.

### Reflect

Use a Venn diagram to compare your classroom with the classrooms in the case studies in terms of:

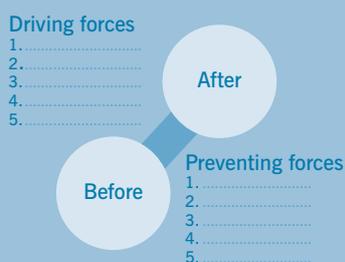


- beliefs about, and opportunities for, student participation in decision making
- opportunities for students to understand and exercise civics and citizenship values
- the positive short-, medium- and long-term costs and benefits of student participation for students, the teacher and the classroom program.

A Venn diagram can help you make comparisons. Similarities are shown in the overlapping area and the differences are shown in the areas that do not overlap.

### \*Reflect/Connect

Use a bone diagram to detail the state of the classrooms in the case studies in terms of teacher practice, programs and the students' predispositions for



participation prior to the implementation of a democratic classroom. Record your responses in the circle labelled 'Before'. Then describe the classroom after a democratic classroom was established in the circle labelled 'After'. List the driving and preventing forces that were apparent. Record the strategies (stated or implied) that the teachers used to maximise the driving forces and overcome or limit the preventing forces.

Use this tool to assist you in defining the current and desired future state of your classroom in terms of teacher practice, programs and your students' predispositions for participation. When drawing the bone diagram for your classroom, replace the words 'Before' and 'After' with 'Current' and 'Future'.

A bone diagram is a graphic organiser that assists the user in recording the current state and the desired future. It assists in the identification of factors that may drive (driving forces) and prevent or slow (preventing forces) the establishment and maintenance of a program.

### \*Reflect/Connect

The teachers in the case studies used a model of Plan, Do, Study and Act (PDSA) to approach the establishment and maintenance of their democratic classrooms. Record your responses for each of the following questions.



- **Plan:** What student needs, opportunities and challenges were implied or explicitly stated in the case studies? If this was your classroom, how would you have planned for the students' needs? How would you have maximised the opportunities and minimised the challenges? What links could you have made to your state or territory's curriculum documents?
- **Do:** What processes were implemented and strategies employed to support the creation and maintenance of democratic spaces in the classroom? If you were in the situations outlined in the case studies, what process would you have implemented and which strategies would you have employed? Provide reasons for your answers.
- **Study:** What changes did the teachers note in their students' attitudes and behaviours? How did the students' civic knowledge improve? If you were the classroom teacher, what indicators of success would you have looked for?
- **Act:** How was the initial program extended? How would you have extended the initial program to provide ongoing opportunities for student decision making within the day-to-day running of the classroom?

Use the PDSA model to assist you in developing and maintaining a democratic classroom for your students.

## Scenarios for implementation

Opportunities exist for students to engage with civics and citizenship values on a regular basis in their classrooms. There are many ways for students to participate as active and engaged members of their classroom community. Three possible scenarios for implementation are:

- giving students responsibility for their learning environment
- exploring competing civics and citizenship values in the classroom
- resolving classroom conflicts in constructive ways.

### Giving students responsibility for their learning environment

Kath Murdoch and Jeni Wilson, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, emphasise the importance of providing authentic opportunities for students to learn about negotiation, collaboration and active participation in classroom decision making. To provide opportunities for student decision making, they suggest posing questions to students about their learning environment. They note that student responses can lead to ‘...the negotiation and establishment of a wide range of arrangements for student learning. Students value being asked these questions, but the real benefits come from teachers showing how their responses are listened to and acted upon.’

Questions could include the following.

- What rules do we need to establish to ensure that the classroom operates fairly and smoothly?
- How could we set up the classroom’s physical environment? Shared and independent learning spaces are needed – how can we achieve this?

### Exploring competing civics and citizenship values in the classroom

Students’ understanding of civics and citizenship values can be strengthened through the exploration of competing values. Competing values are a consequence of seemingly diametrically opposed values positions; for example, the interests of the individual versus the common good. Students need to come to the realisation that values are not absolute; rather there are times when values will need to be qualified in a democratic classroom and in society, generally.

Examples could include:

- a classroom competition where the fastest student receives a ‘handicap’ based on previous performances to create a more even playing field, rather than treating all students as having equal ability
- modifying assessment criteria so less able students can achieve success and more able students are challenged, rather than using the same assessment criteria with all students regardless of ability.

### Resolving classroom conflicts in constructive ways

When engaging students in conflict resolution, redress for the transgressed needs to be balanced with the opportunity for the transgressor to take responsibility for their actions and repair the hurt (physical, social or emotional) they have caused. In this way, the dignity of the ‘victim’, the classroom community and that of the wrongdoer might be restored. Traditionally, conflict resolution between students looked at what classroom rules were broken, who broke the rules and the handing down of an appropriate consequence by the teacher. Classrooms that seek to have students participate in the conflict resolution process ask students to identify who has been hurt by an action or series of actions, how that hurt can be repaired and whose responsibility it is to repair the hurt.

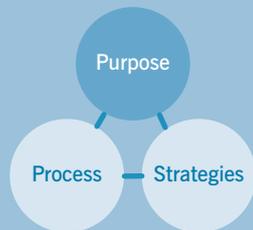
Examples could include:

- peer mediation and conferencing programs
- restorative justice programs.

## \*Construct/Implement

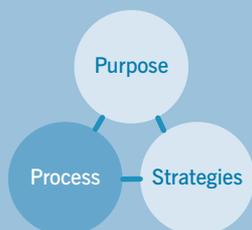
What level of student participation in decision making is desirable or optimal in your classroom context?

What do you expect this level of participation to achieve in terms of student knowledge, skills and dispositions? Who are the key stakeholders that might assist/support you in establishing and maintaining the degree of democracy you have decided on? Key stakeholders may include students, their parents or guardians, colleagues and the principal. Develop and implement a communication plan for bringing stakeholders on board, drawing on the skills and expertise of others and addressing any underlying concerns.



## \*Construct/Implement

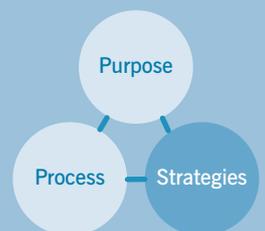
Make a list of the opportunities that currently exist within your classroom program for student participation in decision making in an ongoing



capacity. Research external programs available to schools that could be used to support or extend your program; for example, classroom parliaments, Tribes learning community and restorative justice programs. (See 'Resources' for program details.) Decide on the process that best suits your classroom context. Begin your cycle of Plan, Do, Study and Act.

## \*Construct/Implement

If you are undertaking this task as a collegial learning activity, use a think-pair-share activity to brainstorm a list of strategies that need to be considered to support the learning environment for a democratic classroom. Turn your ideas into a checklist for you and your colleagues to use. Strategies could include:



- arranging for students to sit on chairs in a circle to ensure that all members of the class can be seen
- having a physical object to hold, such as a plush toy or koosh ball, to direct students' attention to the person speaking and ensure that only one person speaks at a time.

## Monitoring progress/ Measuring success

The monitoring of student progress in the area of civics and citizenship education is designed to measure students' civic knowledge and understanding, and the development of skills and dispositions regarding participation in decision making. Teachers can also monitor their own progress as they move towards more democratic learning environments and measure the success that such environments achieve.

## Self-monitoring by students

Self-assessment and monitoring support students to take responsibility for their learning and empowers them to make decisions about the civic knowledge they need to acquire, skills they need to master, civics and citizenship values that need exercising and dispositions to be developed. Self-monitoring tools (see page 20) might include:

- capacity matrix
- two stars and a wish
- learning caterpillars.

## Self- and peer-assessment by students

Engaging students in the development of assessment criteria and rubrics not only ensures that students have a thorough understanding about the expected levels of achievement, it also provides students with opportunities to actively participate in the process. Students work with the teacher to identify the elements that can result in students producing high quality work. Teachers are still free to include aspects for assessment that were not addressed by students. In addition to working with students about how to assess, students can also be involved in making decisions about what to assess.

## Student reflection

Reflection tools (see page 20) allow teachers to understand how students feel about, and their attitudes toward, participation in decision making. Student perceptions about their level of participation can also be revealed. Reflection tools might include:

- learning triangles
- continuums
- quadrants
- traffic lights
- emoticons.

## Other assessment approaches

Other approaches to assessing students in civics and citizenship education include:

- observational checklists and anecdotal records about student participation in decision making
- samples of student work, such as KWHL (What I Know about decision making, What I want to find out, How I can learn more, What I have Learned) charts, as part of student-managed portfolios
- drawings, role-plays and simulations that show a depth of understanding about the democratic processes for decision making and exercising civics and citizenship values.

## Reflect

Use the Auditing your practice and program template (page 19) to monitor your practice and program in terms of providing opportunities for your students to participate in classroom decision making. Each statement needs to be considered in light of your classroom context and the age of the students. Those factors influence the degree to which particular statements can be applied and appropriately addressed. Reflect on how you could work on the areas of practice that require attention.

## Implement

Questions to consider when assessing students include the following.

- What civics and citizenship knowledge, skills and dispositions will I need to look for?
- How can I measure students' progress in civics and citizenship?

Review the approaches listed and add any additional approaches you know. Decide on which approaches best suit your students and your classroom context. Identify the points in time when you will employ the approaches for gathering evidence to monitor progress and measure the success of student participation in decision making. Implement the approaches.

## Auditing your practice and program

The results of the teacher practice and program audit has the capacity to reveal strengths and areas for development in terms of creating and maintaining a democratic learning environment. As a result of being involved in the audit, teachers can focus on improving their practice and program which has the potential to result in a more engaged, student-centred classroom that enhances opportunities for student responsibility and participation.

# Auditing your practice and program

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I take the time to get to know my students and build positive relationships built on trust and mutual respect on both an individual and collective basis.				
I demonstrate that I value and support student participation by listening to and acting on students' suggestions when it is possible and practical to do so.				
I co-establish rules and agreed modes of behaviour and interaction with my students to ensure that the classroom operates fairly and smoothly.				
I seek student input when setting up the classroom's physical environment keeping in mind the room's limitations and the need for shared and independent learning spaces.				
I provide opportunities for students to negotiate tasks after core content is covered, make decisions about who they can work with and how work is to be presented, and contribute to the writing of assessment criteria.				
I employ a range of self-monitoring tools to empower students to monitor and make decisions about their learning. I encourage students to participate in self- and peer-assessment using the same assessment criteria that I use to make judgements about student progress and achievement.				
I use conflict between students as an opportunity for them to develop and practise the skills of negotiation to achieve consensus or resolve differences in constructive ways.				
My program supports the notion that all students are leaders by developing their skills and providing a range of roles and opportunities for them to exercise their capacity to lead.				
My program supports student participation in decision making in an ongoing capacity through forums such as classroom meetings, conventions and parliaments.				
<p>I create a classroom learning environment that promotes the enactment of the nine <i>Values for Australian Schooling</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fair Go</li> <li>• Integrity</li> <li>• Doing Your Best</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Freedom</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Care and Compassion</li> <li>• Honesty and Trustworthiness</li> <li>• Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion</li> </ul>				

## Self-assessment, monitoring and reflection tools for older students

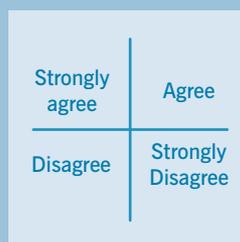
### Capacity matrix

Students shade the appropriate boxes as they monitor their progress (from awareness to understanding to application) in the acquisition of civic knowledge and skills and enactment of civics and citizenship values. They list evidence to support their self-assessment.

TOPIC	Awareness	Understanding	Application	Application
Civics and Citizenship Education				
Civics and Citizenship Education				

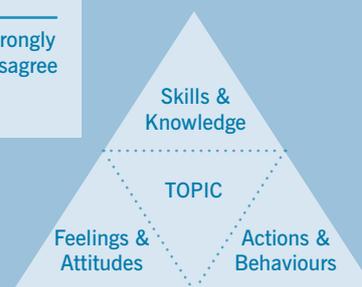
### Quadrants

Students stand in a corner of the room to show their level of agreement on an issue or democratically made decision.



### Learning triangles

Students detail the civic knowledge and skills they have developed and record changes in their feelings, attitudes, actions and behaviours.



### Continuums

Students stand along a line to show their level of understanding and commitment to a democratically made decision or their perceived level of participation in decision making.



## Self-assessment, monitoring and reflection tools for younger students

### Traffic lights

Students shade the traffic lights to indicate their level of understanding of civics and citizenship concepts.



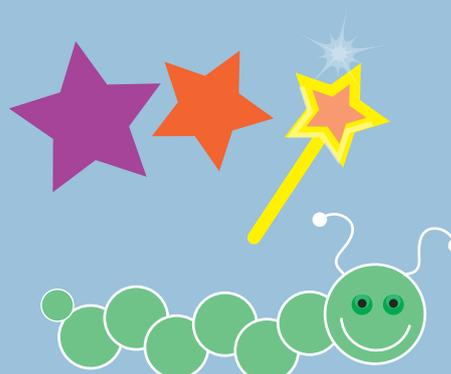
### Emoticons

Students circle the emoticon that best represents how they are feeling about their involvement in decision making.

I feel...



because...



### Two stars and a wish

Students indicate two areas of strength or improvement (stars) and an area for future development (a wish) with regard to their participation in decision making.

### Learning caterpillars

Students add segments to the caterpillar's body in recognition of civic knowledge they have acquired, skills they have mastered or civics and citizenship values they have exercised.

# Resources

The following resources and organisations may be helpful in creating opportunities for creating democratic spaces in the classroom.

## Extending opportunities for student participation in decision making

- Classroom Parliament, Parliamentary Education Office, Do It Yourself role-play in the classroom [www.peo.gov.au/teachers/diy.html](http://www.peo.gov.au/teachers/diy.html)
- Tribes Learning Community [www.tribes.com](http://www.tribes.com)
- The Victorian Association for Restorative Justice [www.varj.asn.au/rp/education.htm](http://www.varj.asn.au/rp/education.htm)
- *Earn and Learn* by Rob Vingerhoets, Dellasta Publishing, Mount Waverley, 1993

## Opportunities for negotiating the curriculum and presenting student work

- 'Negotiating the curriculum with students: a conversation worth having', Education Quarterly Australia, Autumn 2006, Curriculum Corporation [www.eqa.edu.au/site/negotiatingthecurriculum.html](http://www.eqa.edu.au/site/negotiatingthecurriculum.html)
- Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences [http://thomasarmstrong.com/multiple\\_intelligences.htm](http://thomasarmstrong.com/multiple_intelligences.htm)

## Discovering Democracy units (online): The Australian Nation

- The People Make a Nation (Upper Primary) [www1.curriculum.edu.au/ddunits/units/up3nation-glance.htm](http://www1.curriculum.edu.au/ddunits/units/up3nation-glance.htm)
- Democratic Struggles (Lower Secondary) [www1.curriculum.edu.au/ddunits/units/l3struggles-glance.htm](http://www1.curriculum.edu.au/ddunits/units/l3struggles-glance.htm)
- Making a Nation (Middle Secondary) [www1.curriculum.edu.au/ddunits/units/ms4making-glance.htm](http://www1.curriculum.edu.au/ddunits/units/ms4making-glance.htm)

The *Discovering Democracy* units were originally distributed as kits to all primary and secondary schools throughout Australia in 1998.

## Discovering Democracy Australian Readers

The *Discovering Democracy Australian Readers* explore civics and citizenship concepts using contemporary and historical written and visual texts. The books consist of a range of text types from a variety of cultural perspectives and periods. Focus on text types involving the theme: Citizens and Public Life.

- *Australians All! Australian Readers Lower Primary*
- *Australian Readers: Middle Primary Collection*
- *Australian Readers: Upper Primary Collection*
- *Australian Readers: Lower Secondary Collection*
- *Australian Readers: Middle Secondary Collection*

The *Australian Readers* were originally distributed to all primary and secondary schools throughout Australia in 1999. *Australians All! Australian Readers Lower Primary* was distributed in 2001.

## Other teacher resources and reference material

- Parliament and Civic Education Rebate (PACER) – National Capital Education Tourism Project [www.ncetp.org.au](http://www.ncetp.org.au)
- *Discovering Democratic Values: Teaching and learning civic values (DVD)*, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2004
- *Discovering Democratic Values: Teaching and learning civic values*, Civics and Citizenship Education website [http://cmsstage.curriculum.edu.au/cce/discovering\\_democratic\\_values\\_teaching\\_and\\_learn,9477.html](http://cmsstage.curriculum.edu.au/cce/discovering_democratic_values_teaching_and_learn,9477.html)
- *Nine Values for Australian Schooling*, Values Education website [www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/verve\\_resources/9\\_point\\_values\\_with\\_flag\\_only.pdf](http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/verve_resources/9_point_values_with_flag_only.pdf)
- *How to succeed with Creating a Learning Community* by Kath Murdoch and Jeni Wilson, Curriculum Corporation, Carlton South, 2005 [www.curriculumpress.edu.au/main/goproduct/12246](http://www.curriculumpress.edu.au/main/goproduct/12246)