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Can Resilience be built Through a Citizenship Education Curriculum?*

The global financial crisis has impacted upon the way of life of young Europeans with great severity. Across most European countries youth unemployment has remained stubbornly high for many years, compounding the effects of the crisis on the social and psychological well-being of young people. Given that crises are highly likely to occur in the future are there ways to help prepare young people to build resilience to meet an unpredictable future? For a long-term approach to building youth resilience the role of the school is highly significant. Consequently this article asks - what are the elements in a school curriculum that can build resilience for times of crisis? The article explores the case of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship as a possible approach to building resilience amongst school students. The curriculum identifies knowledge, skills and values that students may acquire through this curriculum that build resilience.

Keywords:

Citizenship education, citizenship curriculum, civics, curriculum resilience

1 Introduction: Scientific context

Young Europeans currently live in an era of financial crisis that has impacted upon their way of life with great severity. Levels of youth unemployment across most European countries are exceptionally high and have remained that way for several years with compounding effects on the social and psychological well-being of young people. Given that crises are highly likely to occur in the future are there ways to help prepare young Europeans to build resilience to meet potential future crises? There may well be some short-term attempted solutions but the nature of crises is that they will continue to occur in some form in the future and so a long-term approach to building a broad-based youth resilience is also required. In this context the central question this paper poses is - what are the elements in a school curriculum that can build resilience for times of crisis? One way to examine this question is to explore the case of a new school curriculum that may offer opportunities to build resilience within students. Essentially then, this is a hypothetical proposition that will be linked with a new curriculum in a way that could address issues of how to build resilience over time amongst young Europeans in schools.

The global financial crisis (GFC) has impacted severely upon many from 2008 but the situation facing young Europeans is a far more complex problem, complicated by the impact of significant variables in Europe over the past decade including patterns of migration, levels of unemployment, influx of refugees, as well as declining levels of trust in politics and political institutions,

reduced political efficacy, declining political engagement particularly in political parties, and less support for liberal democratic values. For example, recent findings of the Eurobarometer (Standard EB 77, spring 2012), found that young people tend to distrust the European Union, a level that has constantly increased in the aftermath of the crisis, rising to 50% in 2012.

Similarly, the European Report of the International Civics and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) (Kerr, et. al, 2009) found relatively low levels of trust in many forms of government [local, national, European] amongst young Europeans. Further, according to the Eurobarometer (2012) almost half of the young Europeans surveyed consider that things are going in the wrong direction in the European Union. Although young people claim they are more active in non-governmental and local associations, according to the Eurobarometer Flash 'European Youth: participation in democratic life' 2013 (n°375), they are significantly less engaged in political parties and formal politics, even though most of them generally vote in elections at different levels.

2 International civics and citizenship education study: Europe

The impact of the GFC for many young Europeans has been particularly dramatic particularly in terms of high levels of unemployment. A recent major international study of young people, the International Civics and Citizenship Education Study [ICCS], identified many concerns and issues of young people with politics and government. The European sub-study of the ICCS data is particularly valuable as it provides an insight into issues of resilience amongst young Europeans at the height of the GFC. Included are data about aspects of the crisis such as students' interest in engaging in public and political life and their disposition to do so, perceptions of threats to civil society, understanding of and attitudes

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towards democratic values including freedoms and human rights, civic engagement in the local community, environmental protection, attitudes towards ethnic and racial groups as well as immigrants, and levels of trust in national and European civic institutions.

While the ICCS is a study of 14/15 year old students it does give us a guide as to how young Europeans are responding to a major crisis. I have some reservations about extrapolating from this data set as these young people are directly 'protected' by the school and family though the latter will certainly have been affected by the GFC. In this context the responses of students may be muted and less severe than other young people not in school contexts.

The ICCS 2009 European Report (Kerr, Sturman, Schulz, Burge 2010) investigated European students' knowledge and understanding of civics and citizenship and their perceptions, attitudes and behaviors with respect to specific European-related civic and political issues, institutions and policies. Key data were collected on student knowledge of political systems, multiculturalism, rule of law, social cohesion, legal systems, rights & freedoms, the common good and national identity.

A second set of findings related to civics and citizenship skills such as problem solving, peaceful change, questioning, civic participation, accessing media, analysis and interpretation, communication, cohesion and conflict resolution. A third set of findings addressed values and attitudes towards political trust, identity [broader than national with specific mention of European identity], the common good, human rights, equity [including multiculturalism], and civic participation.

The study identified many significant issues amongst young people across Europe, with significant variations across regions, especially the north - south and west – east divides. While it is important to recognize that schools and education are the domain of individual countries within Europe it is also possible, in a broad sense, to discuss students within Europe as a single entity. Indeed, that is the approach taken by the ICCS study as with other studies (European Commission, 2010; Eurobarometer 2012; Davies 2008; Print, Lange 2013). An overwhelming finding from the European Study was, in 2009, the lack of trust and support for government in Europe. This ICCS European Study data, together with recent Eurobarometer (2012) data, demonstrate some of the issues facing young Europeans in recent times and their responses to those issues. For example, trust in political institutions varied significantly amongst students in the participating 24 countries both at the national and European levels. Latvian student's level of trust in their national government was 32 compared with 74 for Italy and 82 for Finland (2009, p. 84). Similarly levels of trust in the European Commission varied from 45 for students from Cyprus to 75 for Italy with related levels of trust for the European Parliament (2009, p. 64). Given relatively low levels of trust in major institutions young Europeans would need to rely more on other sources to secure their

future. A conclusion that may be drawn from the data, and the last six years of the impacts of the GFC, is that young Europeans need to build, or enhance, their resilience to crises both now and for the future.

3 Resilience

Resilience is commonly defined as the ability to recover from an adversity of some form. It is a process, and not a characteristic trait, by which an individual returns to a previous condition / situation or copes with the adversity (Buzzanell 2010). For Brassett, Croft and Vaughan-Williams (2013) the concept of resilience "... now occupies a central place in understanding and responding to a range of global uncertainties posed by high-impact low-probability systems failures and traumatic events. As such, resilience is often proposed as the solution to a range of otherwise seemingly diverse security challenges including, inter alia, flooding, cybercrime, terrorism, financial crises, critical infrastructure collapse and social disorder." (p. 222). Indeed, in the United Kingdom the government has devised a resilience agenda to enhance the UK's ability to prepare for, respond to and recover from diverse emergencies. These emergencies range from natural disasters to deliberate attacks particularly from terrorists (Cabinet Office 2013) what Davies (2008) refers to as violent extremism.

Resilience, however, is a concept used in diverse academic fields notably psychology [individual resilience], management [system resilience], risk management resilience and military resilience. In the context of this paper resilience refers to a combination of political and social abilities to enable resilient citizens to recover from an economically induced adversity. The definition above is then applied to young people recovering from a political, social or economic adversity. In recent times the adversity is the economic, social, political and psychological impacts of the GFC on young Europeans and in this context it refers to elements of building resilience such as a sense of identity [individual, national and European], self-confidence to handle adverse situations, skills and knowledge of rights and responsibilities in general, and attitudes towards migration, equality, solidarity and the community in general.

This suggests that people can respond to a crisis by means of participating in a resilience process that addresses the crisis and potentially nullifies or reduces the impact of the crisis. Similarly, resilience may be accumulated over time as a result of participating in a program that addresses responding to crises in the future. Such a resilience process can include the effects of schooling in building resilience to existing crises and to potential crises in the future. Consequently this paper suggests that opportunities exist for building resilience amongst young Europeans through a component of the formal curriculum usually referred to as Civic Education or more recently as Civics and Citizenship Education.



4 School curriculum

The school curriculum may be defined in many ways but a central feature of any definition is the group of subjects, learning areas or fields of study that students would be taught during the school year. Some might refer to this as the formal curriculum (Education Queensland 2014; Kelly 2009; Print 2009, 2009b) to distinguish it from the informal curriculum and the hidden curriculum (Kelly 2009). Some might identify the school curriculum as all these experiences and so the term formal curriculum will be used to refer to the school subjects to be studied by students within schools.

While European countries vary significantly in their schooling and the school curriculum they all provide schools for the purpose of educating their children and young people. And while schools are the domain of individual European countries and possibly jurisdictions within those countries, as in the case of federal countries such as Germany, it is still possible to discuss the needs of European school students as a single group.

Given that there are many ways in which young people become politically and civically aware and engaged, or not, (see Print, 2009a; 2009b) what role might the school play in building resilience amongst the young? As seen in Print's model (2009b) there are both formal and informal curriculum experiences that can influence young people at school and the influence of the informal curriculum has been identified elsewhere (Kelly 2009). The importance of locating such learning experiences within the school curriculum is that they are available to all who attend school and given the compulsory nature of schooling in Europe this covers most children and youth. Other sources, such as the family, the community, religion, and friends may have a contribution to make but that is likely to be uneven and potentially biased. A school curriculum, developed and delivered professionally, is the best source of learning for the general population of young people.

There are many intervention projects and programs designed to specifically build resilience amongst students in schools. A good coverage of many pedagogical interventions applied in some schools within Britain are analysed in a research study by the NFER and the Office of Public Management (Bonnell, Copestake, Kerr, Passy, Reed, Salter, Sarwar, Sheikh, 2011). These can be influential in building resilience amongst students but they are not the subject of this paper. Also there are many other aspects to effective learning in schools including the informal curriculum, the role of teachers, and school policies that could affect student resilience but these similarly are not considered here. This paper focuses attention on the role of the formal curriculum, namely the school subjects studied by students, and in particular, a civics and citizenship curriculum, in providing opportunities for building resilience amongst young people in schools.

This is a hypothetical proposal based upon a recently developed curriculum that reflects developments and

directions in civics and citizenship since the beginning of the century. It is necessarily speculative but it raises important questions about elements of the school curriculum that could contribute to building resilience amongst students. More specifically this paper asks a key question—are there elements in a school citizenship curriculum that can build resilience for times of crisis? In this context this paper will primarily address issues related to political and social impacts of crises and how a school curriculum might address building resilience within young people over time.

5 Australian curriculum: civics and citizenship

A civics and citizenship curriculum, based in a democracy, mostly attempts to produce informed, active and engaged citizens who will sustain that democracy (Civics Expert Group 1994; Crick 1998; MCEETYA 2008; Print, Lange 2013). Such citizens may be active in many ways including being critical of their government or authority more generally. In the process of educating the young to become informed and active citizens there are opportunities for building resistance to future crises.

A possibility for building resilience amongst young people may be found in the application of the recently developed Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship (ACARA 2014). This curriculum was developed as part of the Australian Curriculum, a recent initiative in a national curriculum by a federal state (ACARA 2010). Due to a politically inspired review of the whole curriculum, the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship (AC:CC) has not been finally approved by the incoming federal government at the time of preparing this paper. However, it has been supported by all state and territory governments throughout its development process and has been agreed for use in their schools subject to individual state adjustments. Consequently ACARA has released the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship for use by education systems and schools (ACARA 2014). The curriculum may change as a result of the current government review of the Australian Curriculum though significant changes are unlikely given the high levels of support from those governments that actually implement curricula in Australia, namely the eight state and territory governments and not the federal government.

Within the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship (AC – CC) it is possible to identify many components that address building resilience, as defined and identified above, amongst young people in schools. While these were not specifically designed to build resilience to a specific crisis [such as the GFC] or to address a particular time, these components are applicable generally for times of crisis as aspects of building democratic citizens. While there are many ways civics and citizenship education may be interpreted (ACARA 2012; Civics Expert Group 1994; Crick 1998; Niemi, Junn 1998; Shultz, et al., 2010; Torney-Purta et al. 1999), if the explicit intent of a curriculum in democratic citizenship is to build active, informed as well as resilient citizens who can participate



effectively in their democracy, then these characteristics can be incorporated within a curriculum to build resilience in students so that they may address crises when they occur. What characteristics of the AC-CC can contribute to building resilience amongst students?

6 Civics and citizenship rationale and aims

The rationale for the AC: CC is to provide essential learning for young Australians to be active, informed citizens within their democracy and also in an increasingly interconnected world. This position is stated clearly in the Melbourne Declaration (2008) of goals for Australian schooling, a widely accepted and agreed statement of direction for Australian education. To achieve this, the AC: CC focuses on developing the essential knowledge, understanding, skills, values, attitudes and dispositions within young people to enable them to participate in civic life locally, nationally and globally.

The intent of the CCC is to help build active, informed citizens who can participate effectively in their democracy. While these are general aims they have relevance to the role of resilience-building within young citizens. Democracy is not expected to be an uneventful journey. By its nature it allows for dissent and expects its citizens to be resilient to pressures, political, economic, and social, in the process of maintaining democracy.

How can the aims of the AC: CC contribute to building resilience? In encouraging and facilitating young people to become active, informed citizens the aims of the AC: CC also contribute to making for a more resilient student in two main ways. First, this is to be achieved by developing knowledge of democracy, the political system and the means to participate in society. The aims specifically state the AC: CC intends to: “develop the knowledge, understanding and skills that will facilitate the development of the attitudes, values and dispositions students need to fully participate in civic life as active citizens in their communities, the nation, regionally and globally (ACARA 2012, p7). Further they state the curriculum will “develop knowledge and understanding of Australia’s liberal, representative democracy, legal system and civic life, including reference to Australia’s democratic heritage”. (2012, p. 7).

Second, to appreciate citizen rights and responsibilities and the values that underpin liberal democracy. Specifically, the aims intend to “develop a critical appreciation of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic life nationally and globally, including the capacity to act as informed and responsible citizens and to critically examine values and principles that underpin Australia’s liberal democracy” (ACARA 2012, p. 7). By providing this guiding rationale and aims the AC: CC reveals that it also will provide the opportunities for young people to build their resilience.

7 Curriculum structure

How should such a curriculum be structured in order to achieve the stated aims and rationale and also facilitate resilience-building? The AC: CC identified a curriculum structure based on three areas of knowledge, skills, values & dispositions in a way that makes for an informed, active citizen i.e. the knowledge, skills and values that contribute to building resilience for the young as identified above.

Knowledge

What CC knowledge could help build resilience in young people? Typically a civics and citizenship curriculum is built on a knowledge base of political systems, law and citizenship for building an informed, engaged citizen (ACARA 2012; Crick 1998; Torney-Purta et al. 1999). In the case of European students trying to understand their political systems in order to function effectively in times of political crisis, specific knowledge will enable them to address crises by understanding those systems, how they function and how the individual may function within those systems. Given that resilience is a process, and not a characteristic trait, by which an individual returns to a previous condition / situation or copes with the adversity (Buzzanell 2010), then knowledge would facilitate this process by providing a basis upon which an individual may cope with adversity. This knowledge, in a political context, could typically include appropriate knowledge and understanding of political systems; multiculturalism; the legal system; peaceful change processes; the rule of law; social cohesion; rights & responsibilities; the common good; national and European identity; and global issues in an increasingly interconnected world.

What does the AC: CC provide in the form of knowledge that could build resilience amongst students? To prepare an informed citizen the AC: CC identified the importance of students acquiring significant areas of knowledge and understanding that together could also function to build resilience within young people. In summary this knowledge addresses:

- a) Key institutions and processes of the political system and of government and the principles, concepts and values underpinning liberal, representative democracy.
- b) Key elements of the legal system and legal processes including the purpose of laws, constitutional principles, legal rights and responsibilities and the rule of law,
- c) Rights and responsibilities of citizens, including human rights, as well as the right to dissent, critique and communicate and how individuals, groups and governments exert influence on civic debate and citizen engagement.
- d) Modern nations as pluralist, multicultural societies composed on people with multiple citizenships and the contribution of major groups to civic life and to the development of civic identity.



Should European school students be able to learn the knowledge identified above from the AC:CC, adapted to local and European contexts, they will have the basis for building a foundation of resilience related to political and social matters in the future. For students to cope with adversity more effectively they need to understand how their political systems function. If they can understand those systems, through acquiring knowledge of the content above, they are more able to understand the nature of a crisis and what may be done to address that crisis and hence become more resilient to the outcomes of that crisis.

Skills

What CC skills could help build resilience in young people? Typically a civics and citizenship curriculum includes several skills relating to being an engaged citizen (ACARA 2012; Crick 1998; Torney-Purta et al. 1999). What skills could be drawn from such a curriculum that would enable European students to understand their political systems, democracy and the like in order to function effectively in times of crisis? Typically this would include skills of affecting peaceful change; questioning; analysis and interpretation; problem solving; communication; cohesion and conflict resolution; accessing media; electoral participation and civic participation (see ACARA 2012; Print, Milner 2009; Print, Lange, 2013).

What does the AC: CC provide in the form of skills that can build resilience amongst students? To prepare an informed citizen the AC: CC identified the importance of students acquiring skills that together could also function to build resilience within young people. In summary these skills include:

- a) Questioning and research builds inquiring skills including investigating information and ideas, using research skills in reviewing literature and collecting data, questioning existing situations; preparing reports and critiquing research.
- b) Analysis and synthesis enables understanding of information to facilitate evaluating a position or decision, taking a position, and defending a position; distinguishing a statement of fact from an opinion; synthesising research data; understanding and coping with ambiguity.
- c) Collaborative problem-solving and decision-making builds team-working skills to address issues, such as solving problems and resolving conflict resolution through collaboration and demonstrating intercultural competence.
- d) Interpretation and Communication is essential to distinguish vested interests that involves interpreting political policies and decisions, and critiquing media messages, including the interests and value systems that are involved

Familiarity and competence with these skills from the AC: CC, adapted to local and European contexts, will enable European school students to build a foundation of resilience in the future. In school contexts these skills might take the form of presenting ideas in oral and written form; critical reading, debating, writing and listening; applying empathic and social skills; using both traditional and social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook) and the internet in socially constructive ways as communication tools.

Values

Teaching values is an important part of preparing future citizens (Print 2009a; Print, Lange 2013). Civics and citizenship curricula address the learning of values either directly or indirectly, but acknowledge the importance of values to being an engaged citizen (ACARA 2012; Crick 1998; Torney-Purta et al. 1999). But what values could help build resilience amongst young Europeans and that may be found in a civics curriculum? In general the AC: CC encourages the building of a sense of civic identity, particularly one that is broader than national in nature such as European citizenship and global citizenship but including a national identity as well; the importance of valuing and supporting the common good, human rights, equity [incl. multiculturalism]; as well as building trust in political institutions and participation as an active citizen. Given the findings from the ICCS European Report (2009) the need for European school students to build values of civic engagement, political trust and the disposition to participate in their communities have been highlighted.

Values identified in the AC:CC may be categorized into two groups that contribute to building resilience. First, liberal democratic values that are foundational to parliamentary representative democracy, such as freedom of expression, government by the people, the rule of law, fair and effective representation, responsibility, equality, accountability and the common good.

Second, values that relate to others through commitment to civil behaviour, civic duty and human rights in a modern democracy, including care and compassion, respect for all people, fairness, social justice, freedom of speech, honesty, respecting others' rights and views, responsibility, inclusiveness, sustainability, peace, giving and contributing to the common good.

Values then need to be converted into the dispositions, that is the inclination of an individual to behave in a manner that is conducive to being an active, democratic citizen, such as an inclination to participate in the political community, volunteer for community service, participate in civil society, and engage in activities to improve society, guided by civic values and attitudes

To be active, informed citizens European school students need to acquire values identified above from the AC:CC and adapt them to local and European contexts. From this foundation students will have the basis for building a foundation of resilience related to their political and social contexts in the future.



8 Conclusions

Youth in Europe have faced the prolonged impact of the global financial crisis for several years. More is to come as Europe emerges from the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. The impact of extremely high, and sustained, levels of youth unemployment will have lasting effects, not only financially but politically, socially and psychologically, upon the youth of Europe.

This paper has argued that people can respond to a crisis, such as the GFC, by means of participating in a resilience process that potentially nullifies or reduces the impact of the crisis upon people such as European youth. It is also argued that resilience may be accumulated over time as a result of participating in a program, such as a school curriculum, to address potential future crises.

In the short-term European youth have adjusted to the current GFC and its political, social and psychological impacts in different ways and with varying levels of success. A major problem for Europe though is what to do in the longer term. How can young Europeans build resilience to sustain themselves in future crises?

There is a distinct role for schools in general and the school curriculum specifically to play in building resilience amongst school students. Substantial research studies would contribute to a deeper understanding of when and in what ways the school curriculum may contribute to building resilience amongst students. This paper is speculative in its main proposition but has argued that resilience may be built through acquiring the knowledge, skills and values found in a Civics and Citizenship Curriculum within a school curriculum. One example is the recently completed Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship a curriculum that will contribute to building resilience within young Australians. An extrapolation of this curriculum to European countries offers an opportunity to build resilience amongst European school students for the future through an adaptation of the knowledge, skills and values to European contexts.

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Endnote

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