ABSTRACT
          This paper examines the implications of the relationship
between two contemporary international trends in education for women's
equality as citizens. The first trend is that in most Western countries girls
are now achieving statistically, slightly better, average school-leaving
results than boys, and occasioning a hostile populist backlash against this
success. The second trend is the revival of interest in participatory
democratic theory reflected in the current focus on civics and citizenship
education in education systems. The paper addresses the specific question of
what happens to the social and educational order when girls begin to gain
access to the traditional masculine public spheres of male-dominated
curriculum areas. It considers the implications of this greater access for
both girls and boys as learner-citizens, arguing that in the present
international climate it is impossible for girls to be equal with boys as
learner-citizens. Girls remain adjuncts to male learner-citizens. According
to the paper, the two trends are contradictory, positioning girls within a
dialectic of desire and threat in their quests for citizenship. The paper
begins with an overview of the theoretical literature on the gendered nature
of citizenship and its relevance to gender and citizenship education as a
field of study. It describes what has developed into an international
backlash against girls' alleged success in education, and goes on to analyze
the exact nature of this success. The paper argues that the backlash is
fueled by two rhetorical shifts in the discourses of disadvantage relating to
both boys and girls. Finally, it discusses the public taboos and private
imperatives which operate to circumscribe girls' desires to be equal
learner-citizens with boys. (Contains 62 references.) (BT)

IN SEARCH OF THE PUBLIC:

GIRLS' STATUS AS LEARNER-CITIZENS,

GLOBAL ISSUES

AND LOCAL EFFECTS

Dr Victoria Foster

Faculty of Education

University of Wollongong

Australia

email victoria_foster@uow.edu.au

Paper presented at the

Australian Association for Research in Education,

Melbourne, November 1999

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GLOBAL ISSUES AND LOCAL EFFECTS

Intimations of equality

This paper examines the implications of the relationship between two contemporary international trends in education for women's equality as citizens. The first trend is that in most western countries, girls are now achieving statistically slightly better average school-leaving results than boys, in turn occasioning a hostile populist 'backlash' against this success (Foster, forthcoming; Martino and Meyenn, forthcoming). For example, a recent international collection (Mackinnon, Elgqvist-Saltzman and Prentice, 1998) argues that education in the twenty-first century will be "dangerous terrain" for women. The second trend is the revival of interest in participatory democratic theory which is reflected in the strong current focus on civics and citizenship education in education systems.

I want to address the specific question of what happens to the social and educational order when girls begin to gain access to the traditional masculine public spheres of male-dominated curriculum areas. A further question concerns the implications for both girls and boys as learner-citizens, of this greater access. The paper develops the argument that in the present international climate, it is impossible for girls to be equal with boys as learner-citizens. Girls remain adjuncts to the male learner-citizen, a problem which is not addressed in current models of citizenship education. The two trends under discussion are contradictory, positioning girls within a dialectic of desire and threat in their quests for citizenship (see Foster, 1996b; 1998).

The paper begins with a brief overview of the theoretical literature on the gendered nature of citizenship, and its relevance to gender and citizenship education as a field of study. I then describe what has developed into an international backlash against girls' alleged success in education, and go on to analyse the exact nature of this success. I argue that the backlash is fuelled by two rhetorical shifts in the discourses of disadvantage relating to both boys and girls. The final section discusses the public taboos and private imperatives which operate to circumscribe girls' desires to be equal learner-citizens with boys.

The theoretical literature on the gendered nature of citizenship in the modern state

There is a vast literature (for example, Benhabib, 1992; Cass, 1994; Leech, 1994; Pateman, 1988, 1989, 1992; Shanley and Pateman, 1991; Young, 1987) on the gendered nature of citizenship, and "the problem of women's standing in a political order in which citizenship has been made in the male image" (Pateman, 1989:14). Much of this literature focusses on women's exclusion from the ideal of the civic public realm of citizenship which is both normatively masculine, and relies on an opposition between the public and private dimensions of human life. This broad ranging literature has demonstrated that women are in fact outside the frame of patriarchal citizenship and that there is an enormous gulf between the apparent guarantee of full citizenship for women and women's actual lived experience of that guarantee (Leech, 1994:81); and that women's status as citizens is underwritten by a sexual contract (Pateman, 1988) denying them free and equal status with men. Feminist legal theory in particular (for example, Charlesworth, 1992; Gavison, 1992; Graycar, 1992, 1993) shows that the burden of women's responsibility for work associated with the private sphere has implications for their legal status as citizens.

The substance of the feminist critique of citizenship is that equality for women is not, and will not, be delivered merely by attempting to include women in the normative conception of man as citizen by "laundering some of its ideals" (Young, 1987:58). Furthermore, Pateman (1989:14) argues convincingly that women, *as women,* cannot meet the criteria for citizenship.

Pateman's (1988:11) observation that "women are incorporated into a sphere that both is and is not in civil society" underlines women's ambiguous relationship with citizenship. It is this contradiction and ambiguity which pose the dilemma for inserting women into conceptions of citizenship. Although this contradiction is addressed in detail by the feminist critique, it is largely ignored in curriculum development in the field of citizenship education.

Gender and citizenship education as a field of study

In earlier work (Foster 1997), using examples from Australia, Holland and Scandinavia, I explored some of the ways in which school curriculum mirrors the modern state's valorisation of public life and devaluing of the private. The citizen-as-male has his counterpart in the learner-as-male. For example, in Australia, curriculum development in citizenship education has not yet adequately addressed the public-private dialectic in social life. Consequently, it has not succeeded in incorporating private life into the curriculum. Thus, despite the current revival of interest in Australia and other countries in citizenship education, education continues to perpetuate women's and girls' lack of citizenship status.

There are two further problems which need to be addressed in the development of citizenship curriculum. The first problem is the low curriculum status which is accorded the knowledge and skills related to the private, domestic sphere of life. For example, Australian curriculum documents have tended to marginalise women as a group with special needs (Foster 1997), in effect attempting merely to add women to the normative conception of the citizen-as-male in an "add women but don't stir" approach (Foster, 1996a). In Holland, a curriculum reappraisal involving the introduction of the compulsory subject "Care" saw the status of these same skills and knowledge fiercely contested (ten Dam and Volman 1995; Volman 1997).

The second problem concerns the lack of a theoretical framework for citizenship education (Arnot and Dillabough, 1999:2; Foster, 1997). This second problem is exacerbated by the fact that some of the key theoretical literature is already out of print. When ordering texts for a 1999 graduate course 'Gender and Citizenship', I found that Carole Pateman's important book, *The Disorder of Women:Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* published by Polity Press in 1989 is out of print. The same was true of *Gender, Politics and Citizenship in the 1990s* edited by Barbara Sullivan and Gillian Whitehouse and published in 1996 by the University of New South Wales Press. How many other such fundamental texts are no longer available for students of citizenship education?

An international backlash: girls' status as learner-citizens

Over the past few years, in most western countries we have witnessed what Weiner, Arnot and David (1997:620) refer to as a 'moral panic' over claims, largely promulgated through the media, that boys are suffering from new forms of educational disadvantage. Common representations are 'girls are outperforming boys'; 'girls are succeeding at the expense of boys'; 'boys are struggling'; 'boys are in deep trouble'. However, as Mahony and Smedley (1998:41) point out, these kinds of claims are not new, and have a long history.

Media reporting of the 1998 New South Wales Higher School Certificate results frequently referred to girls' apparent success as "dangerous". Such comments bring to mind Rousseau's claim that 'never has a people perished from an excess of wine; all perish from the disorder of women' (Pateman, 1989:17). As Pateman further points out, Rousseau is not the only social or political theorist to regard women as a permanently subversive force within the political order. She elaborates (p.17), 'although women have now been granted citizenship in the liberal democracies, it is still widely believed that they are unfitted for political life and that it would be dangerous if the state were in their hands. This belief is very complex'.

Women are not only believed to be unfit for political life, a fact that is demonstrated by women's low representation (13%) in Australian parliaments. Women are also deemed to be unfit to share equally in the decision-making and higher status positions in civil and social life, that is, public life. In Australia, women are seriously under-represented in a range of occupations as diverse as corporation boards, literature and the arts, chefs, engineers and academics. In New South Wales, while women are 75% of primary school teachers, they are 25% of principals and senior executive staff in schools (NSW Department of Education and Training, 1999).

The nature of girls' educational "success"

To date, girls have experienced only the *appearance* of success in schooling outcomes since this success is yet to have any impact on post-school employment patterns. Australian research (Foster, 1999; NSW Board of Studies, 1996; Teese, Davies, Charlton and Polesel, 1995; Yates and Leder, 1996) shows that the school-leaving credential has quite a different value for boys and girls, and that while boys design their curriculum choices around the "male career trajectory", girls remain "over-represented in subjects with poor vocational linkages" (Teese, Davies, Charlton and Polesel, 1995). It is paradoxical that while girls demonstrate a stronger attachment to, and dependence on, school credentials, this is not paying off for them as it does for boys. In Australia currently, one-third of male early school-leavers go directly into apprenticeships (Lamb and McKenzie, 1999) while 28% of female early leavers go to no form of employment, education or training (Foster, 1999) or else are pregnant (Milne-Home, 1996).

However, despite the lack of post-school rewards, the strong reaction to girls' improved performance at school suggests that this success is challenging deeply held assumptions about girls' and women's status as learner-citizens, and their proper relationship with education. If equal participation in education and its outcomes is fundamental to one's status as a future citizen, then the construction of girls' success as dangerous and threatening poses serious consequences for their relationship with citizenship and civil society. This point is elaborated later in the paper.

It is significant that in Australia, the most contested curriculum areas are the high prestige male-dominated areas of Mathematics and Science. It was only in 1997 that in New South Wales for the first time a girl topped 4 Unit Mathematics, the most difficult level of study. Nevertheless, this was widely misconstrued in the media as girls collectively beating boys at maths and science, and over a longer period of time. Certainly a significant factor in the recent politicization of girls' school performance is the nature of the contested areas themselves and the casting of girls as interlopers and "space invaders" (Foster 1996; 1998) in high status educational terrain assumed to be the natural preserve of males. One wonders about the news value of girls beating boys in Life Management or Child and Family Studies or Care, for example!

In fact, while a small, highly select group of Australian girls is achieving equally with, or better than, boys in male-identified subject areas, girls' participation in these subjects remains very low, and in some cases, is diminishing. Girls continue to have low participation rates in higher level Mathematics, Physics where in some states their participation has declined, and in Technology and Engineering Science subjects where they are a tiny fraction of students (NSW Board of Studies, 1999, unpublished data)

Of particular concern is the dramatic decline in girls' participation in Information Technology and Computer Studies, particularly in New South Wales where the backlash has been the strongest. In 1991 there were many more girls in Computer Studies than there were in 1998, and in 1998 boys outnumbered girls by more than 2:1 in 2-unit, and by 5:1 in the highest level, 3-unit (NSW Board of Studies, 1999, unpublished data). These low participation rates have clear implications for women's entry into technology-related growth areas of the labour market, as well as their influence on the increasing globalisation and construction of knowledge via technology. Women are virtually absent from this important aspect of citizenship.

A rhetorical shift in the discourses of disadvantage

In Australia at least, there have been two interrelated shifts in the discourses of disadvantage relating to gender. The first is in the construction of girls themselves and the second is in the rhetoric alleging that boys are the new disadvantaged. It is interesting that much of the recently emerging academic literature on boys' education tends to decontextualise boys and men from their asymmetrical power relations with girls and women in society, and in education. For instance, in an entire 1998 issue of the journal, *Change: Transformations in Education* which was devoted to boys' education and published by the University of Sydney, discussion of girls' continuing inferior post-school outcomes was virtually non-existent, as was a consideration of the unchanging nature of the sexual division of labour in private domestic life (Bittman and Pixley, 1997; Dempsey, 1997; Wolcott and Glezer, 1995). These are serious issues for citizenship education.

Just as serious is the general lack of challenge of the rhetoric of 'presumptive equality' (Foster, 1995) on which the concept of male disadvantage is founded. Related to this is the general lack of a critique of the enormous resources currently being poured into compensatory programs for boys (NSW Department of School Education, 1994), and of the gendered hierarchy of teaching itself (NSW Department of Education and Training, 1999). An exception, however, is the critique of Mahony and Smedley, 1998. Current issues of boys and their education are entirely political and are intimately bound up with assumptions about boys and girls as learners.

In Australia, initial attempts to achieve greater educational equality for girls centred on positioning girls within a deficit framework, in which they were seen as lacking in relation to male norms of the educated person. Equity policies encouraged girls to measure up to those norms (Foster 1992). The following *Education and Training Strategy for Women* of the NSW Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs (1989) is an example of this deficit framework formulated as policy:

> 'In schools, girls:
>
> • have a low level of participation in technical and key science subjects and in highest level mathematics and science courses
>
> • consider a narrow range of options in making career choices
>
> • have lower levels of self-esteem'

It is clearly a major discursive shift from this earlier deficit framework to the current depiction of girls as actively succeeding, and even beating boys, in male educational terrain. The hostility on the part of some to ideals of equality in schooling for girls has taken the form of a refrain around *What about the boys!* in an

attempt to re-assert the primacy of male educational interests (Foster 1995). This refrain is echoing internationally (Mackinnon, Elgqvist-Saltzman and Prentice 1998; Martino and Meyenn, forthcoming).

It is interesting that this refrain is endemic in countries which have experienced quite different policy contexts. For instance, Mahony and Smedley (1998:49) note significant differences between the British 'particularly hard version of economic rationalism' and the Australian policy framework which is to some degree underpinned by social justice and equity principles. The subtext of the refrain is that notions of educational equality for girls entail taking something very crucial away from boys: their supremacy as learners, as well as the caretaking resources of women and girls, to which boys are assumed to be entitled. By contrast, male educational interests had earlier been strongly supported by a construction which emphasised girls as lacking, rather than viewing boys themselves as being advantaged (Eveline 1995).

The construction of boys' continuing advantage in education, particularly in relation to curriculum participation, use of a range of school resources and post-school outcomes (Teese et al 1995) as "disadvantage", is a rhetorical twist which has been used to great effect both in Australia and Britain in simplistic and emotive accounts (Connell, 1994; Foster 1999). These accounts have been stated and restated by a handful of very vocal individuals, who have been content to argue their case through the media, rather than in academic or other professional forums. Gilbert (1998:21) describes this as 'a conservative and potentially divisive men's movement, which rejected feminism and wanted boys' work to be seen as separate from the broader project of the democratic reform of schooling'. The result is a climate in which the notion of male disadvantage can be stretched to extremes. For example, Michael Brown who teaches at a prestigious Sydney boys' independent school, argues (1994:9) that we are creating a new 'underclass': gifted males! He urges that advocacy is needed for the white, male, Caucasian, non-migrant child.

Connell (1994:2) describes this process in the following way:

> In places where feminist work has created women's studies programs or affirmative action programs (e.g. encouraging girls into science and mathematics), the idea that it is 'boys' turn' for attention and resources is easily spread. This can be reinforced by calling attention to ways in which boys are less successful in schooling than girls: for instance in regard to reading and in higher dropout rates. Combined with statistics about men's earlier death, men's greater rates of injury by violence etc., this can be worked up into a claim that men are the *truly disadvantaged group* (author's emphasis).

Further, Connell (1995:208) persuasively argues that this process which he calls 'masculinity therapy' relies on 'a redefinition of power by shifting from the public world to the inner world of emotion' and (p.210) 'a preoccupation with emotional relationships, a speculative method and a satisfaction with snippets of evidence'.

The notion of male disadvantage is further bolstered by the rhetoric of 'presumptive equality' (Foster, 1995) which includes the widely popular beliefs that women have achieved equality with men in society, and that women and men are equivalent and symmetrical populations. The asymmetry of men's and women's social relations, for example in relation to employment, is quickly dispensed with, and the conclusion is easily reached that it is men and boys who are now suffering inequality, reflected in catchy media grabs such as men are the future second sex.

Desire and threat as dialectical experiences in girls' schooling

Two quite different philosophical approaches to the question of desire can be drawn on to explain the rhetorical shift which has occurred in the construction of girls as learners. Grosz (1989:xvi) distinguishes the first tradition, which conceives of desire as a 'fundamental lack in being, an incompletion or absence

within the subject", from the second tradition in which desire is conceived not as a lack but as a positive force of production and self-actualisation. In this second sense, at the level of the subject, desire functions insofar as the subject 'desires the expansion or maximisation of its power... it is not an unactualised or latent potential; it is always active and real' Grosz (1989:xvi).

Policy discourse concerning the desirable educational achievements of girls has at different times philosophically encompassed both the senses of desire which Grosz has delineated. Earlier, girls were constructed as lacking the necessary masculine learner subjectivity as well as the necessary male-defined knowledge. The very meaning of 'girl' included a negativity or lack (Jones 1993:12). In this construction, the lack was to be removed by increasing girls' access to masculine knowledge areas, but not it transpired, by enhancing their achievement relative to boys in those areas. This first sense of desire as filling a lack resonates with the philosophical and social construction of femininity as 'other' to the masculine.

The second sense of desire referred to by Grosz is, however, much more problematic for girls, because it invokes a more normatively masculine orientation to desire, that of actively seeking and pursuing achievement, and to an extent, power. To date, even more problematically for girls, their achievement has centred specifically on predominantly masculine curriculum areas and subject domains. Although the discourse of reform is couched philosophically in Grosz's first sense, the implications for girls of following that discourse, as well as the outcomes, relate directly to Grosz's second sense of self-actualisation. In concrete terms, this has resulted in the perception that girls are interlopers or 'space invaders' (Foster, 1996b) in male educational terrain, depriving boys of their prior rights as learners. The crucial point here then is that for girls to desire in this second sense places them not only in a contradictory position as 'educated women' (Martin 1991), but also in a position of threat, which is both actual in school, and potential in relation to post-school life. It is significant that the *What about the boys!* movement in Australia emerged at the precise moment (and not a moment earlier) that girls were perceived to be outstripping boys in the areas of male power and privilege. This point is obvious if one asks whether there would have been such concern about boys and their schooling if the contested areas had been different.

The first sense of desire as lacking, in which girls are seen as disadvantaged, is relatively safe for girls, posing no threat to hegemonic masculinity and possibly reinforcing it. It is the second self-actualising sense of desire in the educational setting which, by challenging male educational privilege, becomes threatening for girls and women. This is the sense which comes into play when women cease to be constructed as lacking as in the first sense of desire and instead are constructed as actively pursuing their own educational and occupational goals.

This discussion of desire and threat in girls' schooling raises several questions. For instance, what might happen if girls move outside the frame of their construction as lacking in relation to boys? How could girls be the caretakers of boys if they are equal (or better?) achievers? Such a prospect could be very threatening for girls and their education. For example, the current reaction to girls' perceived advances in maths and science may well make it very difficult for girls to pursue excellence in those subjects, if they are seen as depriving boys of their rights as the high achievers in those areas. In fact, girls' performance in those subjects actually declined from 1993 to 1994 (NSW Board of Studies 1996), when the backlash period was beginning to gain momentum. The interesting question is also raised of whether, and to what extent, girls and women use caretaking as an accommodative strategy to control the threat against them which is posed by greater equality? Finally, given that the value-added dimensions (to use an economic rationalist concept) of care and caretaking are vastly different according to whether they are done by men or women, where does this leave care as a curriculum issue? This question is very pertinent in Australia where care-related matters have been relegated to the bottom of the curriculum hierarchy, with serious implications for the education of both boys and girls as future citizens (Noddings, 1992).

Public taboos: Space invaders in the space-between

This section argues that girls cannot be equal as learner-citizens when they are constructed as 'space invaders' in male educational terrain (Foster 1996; 1998). The notion of the space-between is a heuristic device to analyse and explain girls' experiences of contemporary events in education. In particular, it

explains the lack of change in post-school outcomes for girls, the insignificant degree of change in girls' participation in male-dominated curriculum areas, despite their successes in those areas, the endemic nature of sexual harassment and the inequitable use of school resources by girls (Australian Education Council, 1992; Collins, Batten, Ainley, and Getty, 1996; Foster, 1999; Teese et. al 1995).

For women and girls, pursuing equal educational and citizenship rights, entails entering a particular space - social, psychological and existential - between and beyond that which is prescribed for women, that is, women's 'place', and that which is proscribed to women (Foster 1994; 1996b). This is a space of lived experience, mediating between private and public spheres, where women and girls attempt to negotiate the conflicting, contradictory (at best), or violent and destructive (at worst) demands of a neo-liberal framework of equality, a framework which retains a masculinist subject at its centre (Leck, 1987; Martin, 1991). Both the individual learner-subject and the epistemological foundations of the curriculum are male-defined (Martin, 1981). Girls are to be given equal opportunity to achieve parity in an education system which is normatively masculine (Foster, 1992).

The patriarchal power relations of schooling, and their connection with the public-private dialectic in society make the lived curriculum of schools a complex site of both desire and threat for girls. Equality-directed curriculum reforms require girls to transpose themselves from private realm status to a relatively different position as the equals of males in the public realm of the school. In this process, girls' status is defined and redefined as the 'other' in relation to males, in various ways which frequently define girls physically or sexually in terms of their bodies, and constitute reminders of difference.

Both the idea and the concrete reality of public woman violates public-private norms, requiring women to give up the (dubious) protection of the private sphere, and expose themselves to the threat of violence in the public sphere. Similarly, for girls to take up the promises of reforms towards equality in education, in their present form, entails the threat of violence in one form or another.

Education for women is both contradictory (Martin, 1991) and inasmuch as it entails movement into male terrain, potentially threatening and dangerous. Noting that it is not uncommon for women to experience male violence in connection with educational participation, Rockhill (1987:316) observes that 'we know little about how it is lived in women's lives'. The mass murder in 1989 of 14 female engineering students at the University of Montreal is a stark example of this violence (Malette and Chalouh, 1991).

Private imperatives: Caretaking in the classroom and *What about the boys!*

This final section discusses one of the most profound aspects of the space-between: that both girls' and boys' schooling experiences are situated in what Griffith and Smith (1987:96) refer to as a 'mothering discourse'. This discourse, they suggest, operates according to a 'paradigm of the ideal mother', which can be traced back to Rousseau's prescriptions for Sophie's primary function as Emile's helpmate and nurturer in *Emile*. For example, in contemporary educational discourse, the 'social benefits' and 'reality' often attributed to the co-educational school setting are, in fact, conflated with the injunction on women and girls to take care of and nurture the interests of others. Brady (1998) provides a detailed historical analysis of the role of women teachers as mother-nurturers and carers.

The phenomenon of girls as caretakers of boys in the classroom, has not received any extended, formal discussion in Australian education policy, although Lewis (1990) discusses this dynamic in relation to the university classroom setting. It is, however, one of the most powerful, albeit subtle, determinants of girls' day-to-day schooling experiences. It is powerful because of its location in the public-private nexus and specifically, as part of the unspoken sexual contract whereby the patriarchal meaning of femininity entails the provision of service, sexual and otherwise, to men (Pateman 1988:126). Within the sexual contract, the functions of caring, nurturance and emotional support are seen as women's functions. Women are seen as the keepers and cultivators of the nation state and its development (Yuval Davis, 1997:5). Women, as

Benhabib (1987:95) puts it, are the 'housekeepers of the emotions'. Men may carry out these functions but they are valued differentially according to whether they are done by men or women. The ways in which both female and male students live the curriculum reinforces this sexual contract. In general, boys eschew any association with the feminine or curriculum areas related to the private, domestic sphere, where girls conversely predominate (Collins et. al. 1996).

Education can be seen to be concerned primarily with the initiation of young men as citizens into the 'productive' processes of society and its culture (Foster 1992:58). Conversely, through its devaluing of the private sphere, education underwrites the natural "non-citizenship of women" (Castles, 1999:142) and women's consequent "deviant" status (Yuval Davis, 1997:5). A clear example of the latter point is the case of pregnant schoolgirls whose rights as learner-citizens are withdrawn when they are routinely labelled by society as deviant and unfit for school life (Milne-Home,1996).

Conclusion

In this paper I have raised questions about the ways in which girls may experience and resolve for themselves the simultaneous desire to be 'somebody' which education for citizenship implies, and the potential threat to them from those who in turn feel threatened by girls' living out of this desire. The very processes in schooling which aim to empower boys place girls in a contradictory and paradoxical relationship with the rhetoric of equal and democratic participation which characterises much citizenship education discourse. An unspoken question is, what would happen to boys if girls do become boys' equals and stop being their caretakers? Interestingly, during the current backlash period in Australia, there has been no acknowledgment that girls' equal or better achievement in male-dominated subjects would actually be beneficial for boys in that it would give them an opportunity to see girls in a new, healthier light as peers and equals. Even more profoundly, how would both boys' and girls' development as learner-citizens be enhanced by a citizenship education curriculum which foregrounded the values of caring in both public and private life?

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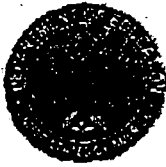
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Organization/Address: *Division of Communication and Education University of Canberra • A.C.T. Australia 2601*	Telephone: *61-2-96642368*	Fax: *61-2-96642368*
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