



# Reimagining civics education: what role can the arts play?

# Foreword



# Art for whose sake?

'Art for art's sake': the saying means art has an intrinsic and sufficient value in itself, and doesn't need to be justified or validated by any benefit it might bring to society, politics or education.

But it's possible to accept that, yes, the arts do have a worth in themselves, and at the same time recognise the value that creating and experiencing art brings to a wide range of human activities, especially education.

That's why ISV has a strong tradition of supporting the role of the arts in education. This commitment starts with a dedicated arts program that supports Member Schools. It is reflected in ISV's annual Student Art Exhibition, now in its 15th year and which has displayed thousands of student art works. We've expanded our work in this area by creating and hosting the Arts Learning Festival.

There's ample evidence that, when students have experience in the arts, it has a positive influence in other areas of their education – as well as on their emotional wellbeing and social engagement. Arts education requires the application of creativity, the development of skills, and the ability to solve problems and work and communicate with others. It can enhance empathy and compassion. These are skills and attributes of value not only in other areas of study, but in students' future careers and their broader development as citizens.

These are all reasons why the arts should be an integral part of a comprehensive school curriculum. That includes civics education, which is the focus of this report. It highlights the undeveloped potential for the arts to encourage and enhance students' community engagement.

This report investigates how arts education can expand the teaching of civic involvement and help develop young people who can engage thoughtfully, flexibly and creatively with issues of public importance.

It encourages and challenges educators to recognise the dividends for students and society when they use the arts to expand ideas of civic learning and civic engagement. I hope it stimulates discussion and action that benefits our young people and, ultimately, our wider society.



*Michelle Green*

Michelle Green  
Chief Executive  
Independent Schools Victoria



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# Executive summary



The arts and civic engagement go hand in hand. From our earliest recorded history via the great Greek tragedies we can see evidence of art shaping values and guiding society. We can trace this lineage through to the powerful street art that shapes culture and social norms today.

The influence of the arts on civic engagement is undeniable (Barber 2013; Doloz et al 1996; Hickey-Moody 2017; Turner and Webb 2016; Matarasso 1997; Rabkin 2017; Williams 1998). It is a beneficial relationship, as civic engagement is essential for a healthy society and vital for generating positive change in the world (Metzger et al, 2018).

Yet since the turn of the century, numerous studies have shown that civic engagement – particularly among adolescents – has fallen dramatically (Ainsley & Friedman, 2012; Barrett & Pachi, 2019; Cho, et al. 2020; McGowan, 2017; Putnam, 2000; Schulz et al., 2016; Xenos et al. 2014). This decline comes at a critical juncture, where the looming fourth industrial revolution calls for civically minded, global citizens engaged in the ethical development of the shared values required to shape our common future (Schwab, 2017).

Alongside families, schools play a vital role in influencing civic engagement and the development of social identity and values in students. But current methods of teaching civic engagement are often out of sync with the way students engage with civic issues. Adolescents prefer to engage with issues of civic importance through digital platforms rather than traditional avenues for civic engagement such as journalism and news services (UNICEF, 2020). However, as digital platforms and social media typically mirror existing self-interest, this can create a virtual echo chamber that erodes, rather than enhances, civic engagement (Ekström & Shehata, 2019).

Arts have shown a tendency, time and time again, to increase civic engagement. If our school systems and curriculum structures are not meeting global standards of achievement relating to civic engagement (Ainsley & Friedman, 2012; McGowan, 2017; Schulz et al., 2016), what role can arts education play to address this performance and foster greater civic engagement in students?

This research report explores how civic engagement is taught in schools. It investigates how arts education can expand the teaching of civic engagement and help develop young people who can engage thoughtfully and flexibly with issues of civic importance. The study design included a literature review of civic engagement and its link to the arts, as well as how civic learning occurs in schools across the developed world. We used the literature review to co-design with Harvard University's Project Zero a survey of teachers and school leaders in Independent schools in Victoria, to explore what is currently happening on the ground in schools. Qualitative data through interviews with survey participants rounded out the study.

The study found that there are significant dividends for students and society when we engage the arts to expand our ideas of civic learning and civic engagement. However, in participating schools, the connection between arts and civic learning – and opportunities for increased civic engagement – occurs in pockets and is typically impromptu and informal.

Current learning outcomes regarding civic engagement and citizenship are heavily skewed toward civic knowledge around democracy and political institutions, both in Australia and overseas. It appears the Australian curriculum is under-developed when it comes to providing learning opportunities that permit deep exploration of civic issues through a sociocultural framework using the arts.

*In art and democracy alike,  
imagination is the supreme virtue.  
Art thus nurtures democracy,  
and democracy embraces art.  
Civic education is as much arts  
education as social science.*

*Barber (2013, 283)*

# Key findings

- There is a strong correlation through many studies that link participation in the arts with more active participation in civic society.
- Current learning outcomes regarding civic engagement and citizenship are angled toward civic knowledge around democracy and political institutions, both in Australia and overseas. It appears the Australian curriculum is lagging when it comes to providing learning opportunities that permit deep exploration of civic issues through a sociocultural framework.
- The link between civic engagement and the arts is clear among educators surveyed, who were aware of the role culture and the arts play in shaping and forming civic identity. However, a pre-disposition to the arts – both at the school and individual level – and the socioeconomic status of the school may influence the strength of this view.
- Survey respondents viewed civic engagement as more than a matter of exercising one's formal rights and responsibilities. They recognised that art and culture play a part in being civically engaged and that an outcome of civic engagement is making a difference to community.
- The most common civic learning opportunities provided to students were a mixture of altruistic activities and excursions and incursions into the community.
- In teaching civic engagement, almost three quarters of respondents (71 per cent) suggested that their school involved, made use of or drew upon art for civic learning activities. Participants who agreed with the question that their school provides students with sufficient opportunities for civic engagement were significantly more likely to indicate that their school made use of the arts in teaching civic engagement (76 per cent net agree vs. 45 per cent uncertain or net disagree).
- Among art-related civic activities, the majority of participants indicated that excursions or incursions focused on culture and art and artistic endeavours and/or cultural practices were provided to students (90 per cent and 83 per cent). However, only two out of five (42 per cent) indicated that their school provided civically oriented art making experiences.
- The most common approaches to incorporating the arts into civic learning activities relied on viewing art, and less so in constructing deeper, more authentic art experiences such as participating and collaborating to create civically themed art.
- Survey respondents perceived art-related civic learning experiences for students as less important compared with non-art civic learning experiences (net 66 per cent vs. net 100 per cent). Forty-five per cent of participants selected participating in artistic endeavours and/or cultural practices as important (5th out of 16th in ranking), a third (33 per cent) selected joining excursions or incursions focused on culture and art (8th of 16th in ranking) and 16 per cent selected civically-oriented art making experiences as important (13th of 16 in ranking).
- Providing students with civically oriented art making experiences was perceived as having low prevalence and low importance compared to other civic learning opportunities. This suggests there is a difference between how respondents view the importance of art making and art responding activities and their relationship with developing civic engagement in students.
- Reflecting on self-identity and connections to civic issues is a learning opportunity deemed as highly important, but something that occurs relatively infrequently in schools. There is an opportunity for schools to link arts education and civic engagement into authentic learning experiences that encourage identity development and the exploration of purpose among students.
- Time was considered the main barrier in providing students the opportunity to connect art and civic learning, followed by an over-crowded and rigid curriculum.

## The most common civic learning opportunities provided to students

### Raising funds

for charity of social cause



93%



90%

Joining excursions or incursions focused on culture & art

### Volunteering and/or partnering

with community groups



86%



85%

Joining excursions or incursions focused on democracy & society

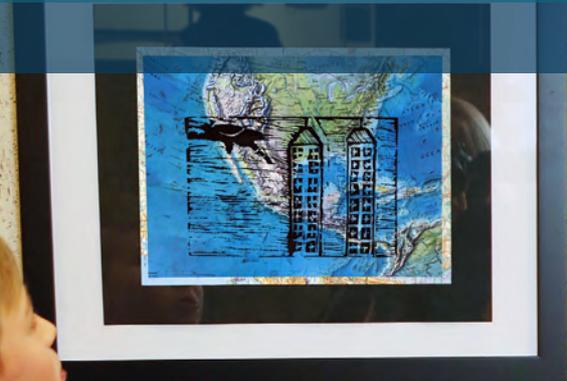
While the research findings show that a high proportion of schools involve the arts in civic learning opportunities, it appears this is often at a superficial level involving excursions related to art and is highly determined by the level of investment in the arts and each school's socio-economic status. This highlights the need for the development of resources, tools, frameworks and 'how to' guides for educators to develop and deliver purposeful cross-curriculum activities involving the arts and civic learning. This would assist those on the ground responsible for delivering the curriculum to better understand the benefits and advantages to involving the arts in civic learning and how to draw on the arts to create meaningful, authentic civic learning opportunities.

Our findings emphasise the need to re-examine how civic learning occurs in schools. They draw attention to the need to bridge the gap between the institutional view of civics common in today's curriculum, and the broader sociocultural aspects of participating in civic discourse that is more attuned to how our students engage with issues of civic importance.

The findings reveal that the institutional approach to civics and citizenship prevalent in the Australian curriculum is no longer enough to equip students with the ability to develop and refine the skills, characteristics and values required to confront the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution.

There is a role for arts education to play in shouldering some of this responsibility to develop this capacity among our students.

# Introduction



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## This study investigates the teaching of civic engagement in schools and the opportunities available for students to participate in civic learning activities. The report explores a key question: what role can arts education play in fostering greater civic engagement in students?

It is an important question to ask. The world is becoming a smaller, more connected place, where technology is rapidly changing many facets of our lives and driving change across all industries. This change is underpinned by a seismic shift taking place across the world that Klaus Schwab (2017) has dubbed the 'fourth industrial revolution' – that is, the blending of technologies where the traditional boundaries between the digital, physical and biological worlds no longer hold.

This creates a world of infinite possibilities, but many significant global problems linger. These problems demand solutions that current political and economic frameworks are arguably poorly equipped to solve, problems that are no longer confined to national borders. Examples include the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, ethical dilemmas surrounding artificial intelligence and machine learning (Anderson & Anderson, 2011; Etzioni & Etzioni, 2017), geo-political instability, environmental degradation and human migration.

If we are to seize the opportunities afforded to us through the fourth industrial revolution, we will require coordinated universal responses to these kind of structural issues, led by informed global citizens. Adolescence is a time when people develop the values and world views that will shape their future; how young people learn to engage with issues of public concern is critical to both our ability to confront these global challenges and a functioning democracy.

However, young people across the world are turning away from traditional journalism and news media as avenues to engage with civic issues, preferring to access this kind of information via social media and other digital platforms (Barry, 2005; Biesta et al. 2009; Coleman, 2006, Harris et al. 2010; Smith et al. 2005).

Digital platforms like social media increase opportunities for people to remain informed about political and social issues. However, they also often filter information based on individual values and interests, creating a 'self-reinforcing spiral' which can create greater polarisation of views and have a negative effect on civic engagement (Ekström & Shehata, 2019, p.105). The recent conspiracy theory that 5G caused the spread of COVID-19 originated on social media and provides a concrete example of how it can generate divisions based on misinformation and untruths (Ahmed et al., 2020).

To avoid the kind of polarisation of views demonstrated during such global health emergencies, it is imperative that we develop young people who can engage thoughtfully and flexibly with issues of civic importance, students who are conscious of broader trends and equipped with a more nuanced understanding of global challenges. The school system has an important role – alongside the family – in developing such skills in young people.



Art evokes the mystery without which the world would not exist.

*René Magritte*



However, across the developed world, global measures of civic engagement among school-aged students are declining. Comparative analysis of education systems across 28 nations found alarmingly low levels of civic engagement among young people (Ainsley and Friedman, 2012; McGowan, 2017; Schulz et al., 2016). In Australia, the National Assessment Program 2016 data on testing on civics and citizenship suggests a significant decline in the proportion of students achieving at or above the proficient standard (Earp, 2017).

This calls into question the way in which we teach civics and the types of civic learning opportunities we provide in our schools. If current curriculum frameworks and teaching practices are not working, are there other areas of the curriculum that may be able to fill this void? What role does the arts play in fostering greater civic engagement in students?

Art has always influenced patterns of civic engagement and driven contemplation on civic issues. The amphitheatre in ancient Greece, for example, advanced an ethically instructive form of art that provided a moral compass for society.

This was based on the belief that the arts encouraged virtue (Stern & Seifert, 2009). From the Renaissance through to more recent periods, art has influenced social values and commented on political movements of the time. Jacques-Louis David's 1793 painting, *The Death of Marat*, depicting a murdered journalist during the French Revolution is one example, as is Pablo Picasso's 1937 work *Guernica* - a famous anti-war statement commenting on the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War. Street artist Banksy, who has risen to international fame for his politically-charged graffiti, provides a contemporary example of art influencing civic discourse and shaping society.

Until relatively recently, however, art was the domain of specialised centres and buildings, created and consumed in purpose-built galleries or concert halls. But as artists like Banksy demonstrate, we increasingly view public places as avenues for the creation, interpretation and consumption of art. Public arts spaces can be seen as a modern re-imagining of Jürgen Habermas' (1992) idea of a public sphere, a space between the state and civic society where rational citizens conduct analytical discussion of issues of public interest.



In this process, citizens become active participants in society, thus demonstrating their civic engagement. As a result, the idea that participating in art and participating in civic society are fundamentally connected is beginning to bear out on city streets and in public places all over the world.

One place where the link between arts and civic engagement remains untested is in our schools. If art can assist in developing civic engagement through providing the means to engage with the important questions plaguing society, arts education can perform a similar role in our schools.

To explore the linkages (potential or otherwise) between citizenship, civic engagement and arts education, Independent Schools Victoria (ISV) partnered with Project Zero, a thinktank revolving around the arts and humanities within the Harvard School of Education. Employing a mixed-methods approach, we conducted an extensive literature review to frame the problem and uncover the link between arts and civic engagement. We used these results to develop and implement a survey of school leaders and teachers at Victorian Independent schools to investigate what role arts education currently plays in developing global citizens and increasing civic engagement of students.

The challenge to education systems is to rethink how curriculum structures can incorporate what it means to foster global citizenship in students.

# Literature review



# Arts, civic engagement and citizenship: the new civic commons?

Civic engagement itself is a difficult concept to bed down. Some scholars trace it back to the ancient Greek city-state of Athens, where citizenship was more than a just a legal construct, since it included intangible communal attitudes toward the polis (Johnstone, 2002, Manville, 2014). Others (Holdsworth et al., 2007; Winter, 2003) assert that civic engagement is a direct decedent of social capital theory, first attributed to Alexis de Tocqueville's writings on American democracy in the 1880s (Tocqueville, 2003).

Social capital theory, more recently linked to American political scientist Robert Putnam (1993; 2000), asserts that it is the development of shared values and understandings that enable individuals and groups to develop the trust necessary to form societies. Habermas' (1992) conceptualisation of a public sphere, a space between the state and civil society where rational citizens conduct analytical discussion of issues of public interest, is another theory covering similar concepts surrounding what it means to be civically engaged.

These broad theories touching on the idea of civic engagement share one common trait: they rest on the assumption that to be an engaged citizen requires some level of active participation in society. This view is supported by contemporary concepts of civic engagement, including Thomas Erlich's often quoted definition, which argues we must actively work to make a difference to civic life.

Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.

*Thomas Erlich (2000, p.iv)*

If the creation of society is fundamentally searching for common meanings and directions (Williams, 1989), perhaps civic engagement can be viewed as a way to enable people to actively relate with one another to shape these shared values. In this sense, active participation and civic engagement are intrinsically linked – one cannot exist without the other.

Civic engagement is often characterised through the variety of actions undertaken by individuals, including voting and volunteering (Hart and Atkins 2007), activities expressing political actions (Keeter et al., 2002), cultural practices (Stepick et al., 2008), commitment to civic goals and ideals (Flanagan et al., 1998), and concepts of social responsibility and personal worth (Kahne & Sporte 2008). However, these are merely activities that civically engaged people may perform. At its heart, civic engagement requires the formation of values and beliefs through active participation in society and can thus be understood as a broad construct in relation to how individuals participate in civic life and exercise their responsibilities as citizens.



Active participation in public life is said to embolden citizens to participate further in society, increase knowledge and understanding of society, bring participants closer to fellow citizens, and have a positive effect on political engagement and the economy (Putnam, 1993; 2000). Stern and Seifert (2009) argue that art could be used to strategically influence civic engagement by instructing or persuading civic participation, connecting and constructing communities, as well as fostering social cohesion and cultural vitality. This is because art is often regarded as an indispensable public good that provides meaning to the world through binding people and culture together to make sense of the collective human experience.

Indeed, existing knowledge suggests there is a positive relationship between the arts and civic engagement (Barber, 2013; Hickey-Moody, 2017; Turner and Webb, 2016; Matarasso, 1997; Rabkin, 2017; Williams, 1989). One explanation is that participation in the arts evokes imagination. Daloz et al.'s (1996) research sought to understand how individuals live lives of commitment in a complex world and concluded that 'the quality of a society is dependent on the strength of its imagination in the world' (p. 133). In a similar vein, Barber (2013, pp. 281-283) suggests that if 'imagination is the supreme virtue', then citizens, 'like artists, use imagination to discover common ground and shared values sufficient to adjudicate private differences and achieve high common purposes'.

The connection between arts and civic engagement continues to receive scholarly attention across the world. These various studies invariably place the arts centre-stage in relation to addressing social issues and civic life.

For example, Matarasso's (1997) influential study into the social impact of participation in the arts in the United Kingdom found five areas in which the arts had a social impact: personal development; community empowerment; local image and identity; imagination and vision; and, importantly, social cohesion. In a similar vein, Della Posta et al. (2014) analysed how voluntary associations and public art activities can mobilise citizens and increase voter turnout in Europe and France. Their results suggest an association between public arts and greater civic engagement, showing that EU election turnout was higher in locations where there were greater number of arts activities per capita.



Jeanotte's (2003) research into Canada's General Social Survey found that high levels of participation in what she calls cultural consumption – including participation in arts, like dance, theatre and classical music – is associated with higher rates of volunteerism, an activity that Hart and Atkins (2007) established demonstrates civic engagement. Further, findings of the 2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts in the United States illustrate that individuals were two and a half times more likely to volunteer in their communities if they attended museums or consumed fine arts (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). Similarly, a more recent evaluation of 52 projects involving 30 artists delivered in various neighbourhoods in Minnesota showed that respondents living on blocks where project activities occurred were twice as likely to state that it was very important to them to be civically engaged (Nicodemus et al., 2016).

Also in America, Catterall et al.'s (1999) analysis of data from the Department of Education's National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), which tracks 25,000 high school students, found that those deemed high participators in arts had not only consistently better academic results, but were more likely to participate in community service and thus be more civically engaged.

Catterall et. al. (2012) later returned to the longitudinal data and found that arts participation has a positive impact on civic engagement, with empirical evidence suggesting comparatively high levels of volunteering, voting and engagement with local or school politics (Catterall et al., 2012, p. 18). In general, Rabkin's (2017) comparison of two youth-based programs showed evidence of greater civic engagement as an outcome of arts participation.

Arts programs are also purported to have a positive effect on local governance and community building on both national and state levels. For example, in Australia, Williams' (1997) study of the social impact of almost 90 community-based arts projects found that arts activities can emerge as 'powerful catalysts for developing healthy, viable communities' (p. 8). Holdsworth et al.'s (2007) research into young people's civic engagement, citizenship and participation across several Victorian local government associations reached similar conclusions, it suggests that councils can use community mechanisms like youth-based arts programs to increase the civic engagement of young people.

# The role of schools in promoting civic engagement and citizenship

If active civic engagement is thought to boost society and democratic participation, then it is unsurprising that across the developed world there has been a determined push to enhance the teaching of civic engagement in schools (Edington & Ambrose, 2010; Holdsworth et al., 2007; Kisby, 2006; Pontes et al., 2019). Broadly speaking, the role of civic education is to prepare individuals to 'acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent responsible citizens throughout their lives' (CIRCLE and Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2003, p.4).

In Australia as well as overseas, countries have created education policy focused on providing young people with knowledge on citizenship, democracy and democratic institutions, in response to a perceived decline in levels of social capital and civic engagement among younger people. The Australian Government, for example, introduced the *Discovering Democracy Program* around the turn of the century with the aim to improve students' knowledge, skills and attitudes about their system of government and civic life (Erebus Consulting Group, 1999).

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's (IEEA) 1999 comparative analysis of civic and citizenship education in 28 countries provides a wealth of information for comparative purposes concerning the teaching of civic engagement and citizenship. Ainley and Friedman's (2012, p.5) paper on the results of the IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2009 found that in countries where a dedicated subject on civics and citizenship was in place, 'greater emphasis' was assigned on topics concerning the government and parliamentary systems.

Analysis of the Australian curriculum documentation for the civics and citizenship subject (ACARA, 2018a) indicates that the Australian curriculum's focus on delivering civic knowledge is predominately focused on teaching concepts around democracy, parliament and the process of governing, which confirms Ainley and Friedman's (2012) view.

For instance, within the Australian curriculum for civic and citizenship education, there are three focus areas:

- government and democracy
- laws and citizens
- citizenship, diversity and inquiry.

When one unpacks the specific content descriptions at Years 7 to 9, all three focus areas distinctly lean toward the teaching of Australian democratic society. There is some consideration given to issues of national identity and religion in Year 8, and consideration to how students remain connected in a global world in Year 9, but these examples are exceptions. What is clear is that the curriculum overlooks the importance of popular culture in shaping views and values across society.

As Kuttner (2015, 70) points out, issues of citizenship and civic engagement 'is not only a matter of formal rights and responsibilities; it is also a matter of culture'. Da Silva et al's (2014) study into culture and civic engagement found that while traditional measures of civic participation (such as volunteering and voting) in America show decline, when the definition of civic engagement is extended to include artistic and cultural activities, participation levels rose considerably between 1981 and 2004.

## What is clear is that the curriculum overlooks the importance of popular culture in shaping views and values across society.

The relationship between young people and culture – and its spread through social media – suggests that adding culture and art into the conversation about civic engagement is worth serious consideration. As Ann Swidler (2001, 90) observes, ‘young people are voracious cultural consumers because they are still trying out (and trying on) the possible selves they might become... out of which they will construct the patterns of their adult lives’.

There is a significant body of research that shows young people eschewing more traditional concepts of civic engagement (Barry, 2005; Biesta et al. 2009; Coleman, 2006, Harris et al. 2010; Smith et al. 2005). Bennett’s (2008) research shows that young people favour loose community-based elements of civic engagement that aligns with personal acts of civic participation through networks often cultivated through digital platforms and information technology (Bennett, 2008; Bennett et al., 2009).

There is little evidence of guidance from curriculum bodies on how to include active civic participation into the classroom mix that involves popular culture, art and digital technologies. This is despite some – like Reichert and Print (2018) – arguing that fostering opportunities for civic participation could be far more effective than traditional didactic ‘chalk and talk’ in facilitating civic learning in the classroom. The Australian curriculum guides school leaders and teachers to predominately focus their instruction on developing civic knowledge around formal responsibilities and institutions. As such, it is equally important to provide students with practical opportunities to use their skills and understanding around citizenship and society through mediums and platforms with which they are familiar – popular culture, art and digital technologies.

Opportunities to exercise the knowledge developed through studies on civics and citizenship in this way are largely dependent on each school’s individual approach.

Further, a lack of formal structured opportunities for students to practise civic engagement through participatory activities in school may be related to outdated ideas on what constitutes civic engagement in the modern world.

This is an important consideration, as the dominant approach to civic learning in school systems is failing to keep pace with the changing world. Studies conducted internationally and in Australia, show there are alarmingly low levels of civic engagement among young people (Ainsley & Friedman, 2012; McGowan, 2017; Schulz et al., 2016). For example, only about half of the countries internationally involved in the 2016 ICCS assessment showed improvements in comparison to 2009’s assessment on civics and citizenship (Schulz et al., 2016).

In Australia, the recently compiled analysis of 2016 National Assessment Program data on civics and citizenship found that ‘38 per cent of Year 10 students achieved at or above the proficient standard – significantly lower than the 44 per cent who achieved the standard in 2013 and 49 per cent who achieved it in 2010’ (Earp, 2017, p. 1). The former Australian Federal Education Minister, the Hon. Simon Birmingham, slammed these results as ‘woeful’ (McGowan, 2017). More recently, the Victorian Education Minister, the Hon. James Merlino urged the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) to work with Victorian schools to enhance civic and citizenship education following impassioned pleas from the state’s peak body for students who are concerned about the level of civic engagement of students (Cook, 2019).

Addressing low student performance in relation to civic engagement internationally may require us to critically re-think the way we teach civic engagement in schools. If the explicit teaching of civics and citizenship is not delivering the required results, are there other areas of the curriculum that may assist in lifting student outcomes?

# Is there a role for arts education to increase civic engagement in students?

Changes in societies across the world over recent decades have seen a shift in how and where art is consumed. More and more, public places are becoming spaces for the creation, interpretation and consumption of art. In speaking about arts and urban spaces, Barber (2013, 272) notes that they are places of cultural and artistic exchange, where ideals of equality, justice and participation 'emerge from empathy and common ground and are equally the terrain of the democratic city and the artistic spirit'. Kwon (1997, 91) suggests that both arts practitioners and arts consumers 'pursue a more intense engagement with the outside world and everyday life – a critique of culture that is inclusive of non-art spaces', where art and civic engagement becomes entangled in one tightly moulded experience.

In using public spaces as places to express and consume art and engage in civic society, we see a phenomenon not too distant from the theories of de Tocqueville (2003) or Putnam (1993; 2000) on social capital. This is because such spaces provide opportunities for people and/or groups to come together to engage with ideas about the contemporary world and develop the shared values necessary to underpin society. Johanson's (2015, 112) work supports this view. Through a case study of cultural and artistic events in public parks in Vancouver, she investigated the value of public arts displays, arguing that public arts is a contemporary version of what is known as the commons – 'a space where common social, political and economic issues can be identified and considered'.

As public spaces gave way to private interests from the end of the Second World War through the 1980s, the role of the commons diminished. The arts and their use in public spaces provides an opportunity not only to re-think the traditional commons, but also a chance to reclaim the necessary public places where citizens can exercise their civic rights and forge the common meanings necessary for society to flourish. If this is the case, and art can indeed assist in developing civic engagement through providing the material in which to engage in the important questions and considerations plaguing society, can arts education perform a similar role in our schools? We argue that arts education emphatically provides a platform for civic learning opportunities in our schools by connecting students to cultural and social issues when making art or responding to art forms to interpret their meanings. As Freedman (2003) has argued, art has a broader role than educating people about the technicalities of art production:

Art is a vital part and contributor to social life and students have the possibility of learning about life through art. At its root, the purpose of art education is not to merely educate people about the technical and formal qualities of artifacts, but to help to extend the meaning of those qualities and artifacts to show their importance in human existence' (Freedman 2003, p.80).

As described by Zimmerman (2010, p.86), society-centred art curriculum places meaning on achieving communal and societal needs through 'learning values and content derived from broad social issues and concerns', often looking at issues via multicultural, global, community-based and intercultural understandings. The Australian Curriculum for Arts has recognised the broad role the arts play in educating students outlined by Freedman (2003) and Zimmerman (2010). It does so by implementing two distinct strands in arts education: making and responding. Making refers to the 'knowledge, skills, techniques, processes, materials and technologies to explore arts practices and make artworks that communicate ideas and intentions'. Responding refers to, among other things, interpreting artworks 'through different contexts, including social, cultural and historical contexts' (ACARA 2018b).

Although Australian schools are guided by the curriculum, the way in which they provide students with civic learning opportunities that explore the arts is at the discretion of school leaders and teachers. How such opportunities are linked to broader notions of civic engagement is unknown and, perhaps, in many cases not linked at all.

There is a clear connection between the arts and civic engagement. In essence, both concepts seek to achieve the same thing: to develop common and shared meaning of the world, which is the glue that shapes and holds society together.

# Method



Materials Robot  
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This study explores the relationship between arts education and the civic learning and engagement of students. From reviewing the existing literature and conducting consultations with academics working in civic engagement and the arts, Independent Schools Victoria, in conjunction with Harvard University's Project Zero, developed five specific research questions for investigation:

1. To what extent do educators perceive a relationship between civic learning and engagement and arts education?
2. What do educators believe are the most important purposes of school-based civic learning experiences?
3. What noteworthy opportunities do students have to participate in civic learning activities, inside and outside the regular curriculum?
4. In what ways, if at all, do students' civic learning activities involve, make use of, or draw on art?
5. What obstacles or challenges (personal and institutional) do teachers perceive for including opportunities for students to connect art and civic learning?

To explore these questions, Independent Schools Victoria and Project Zero co-designed and distributed an online survey to a population of 478 educators from 217 independent schools in Victoria. The sample was made up of school leaders, and art and humanities teachers. We collected responses from 183 educators across 121 schools, a response rate of 38 per cent and a margin of error of six per cent. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the final survey data by enrolment size, school socioeconomic status (SES) and location.

The final research sample shows some bias toward medium SES schools and a slight over-representation from schools with large enrolments in comparison to the population distribution of all Independent schools in Victoria. Table 2 outlines the demographics of individual participants who completed the survey.

Individual respondents included a high proportion of school principals and those in leadership positions. Approximately 70 per cent of teachers in the sample taught arts in their school. This category included not only visual arts, but broader artistic pursuits such as music and drama. Unsurprisingly with a high proportion of specialist arts teachers in the sample, there was a strong tendency for respondents who work across more than one level of the school.

After we analysed the survey results in 2019, 10 respondents were chosen for a follow up interview to provide further explanation for their answers via either a focus group (up to five participants) or one-to-one interview (five participants).

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded, before a thematic analysis was conducted to tease out key themes captured through the survey.

**Table 1: Breakdown of sample school demographics**

			%
School band SES	Low SES (<90)	11	6%
	Medium SES (91-120)	148	81%
	High SES (>120)	14	8%
	Special Schools	10	5%
School size by enrolment	Small (<50)	8	4%
	Medium (51-999)	117	64%
	Large (>1000)	58	32%
School location	Metro	128	70%
	Regional	55	30%
		NET	183 100%

**Table 2: Survey participant demographics**

			%
Role in the school	Teaching staff	87	48%
	Principal	66	36%
	Teaching staff (non-teaching role)	30	16%
Leadership role in school	Yes (including principals)	160	87%
	No	23	13%
Areas of work	Senior years (10 - 12)	39	21%
	Middle years (7 - 9)	14	8%
	Primary Years (Prep - 6)	18	10%
	Across multiple areas	111	61%
	Other	1	1%
Main subject taught in school	Art subjects	59	69%
	Non-art subjects	31	36%
		NET	183 100%



# Results and findings



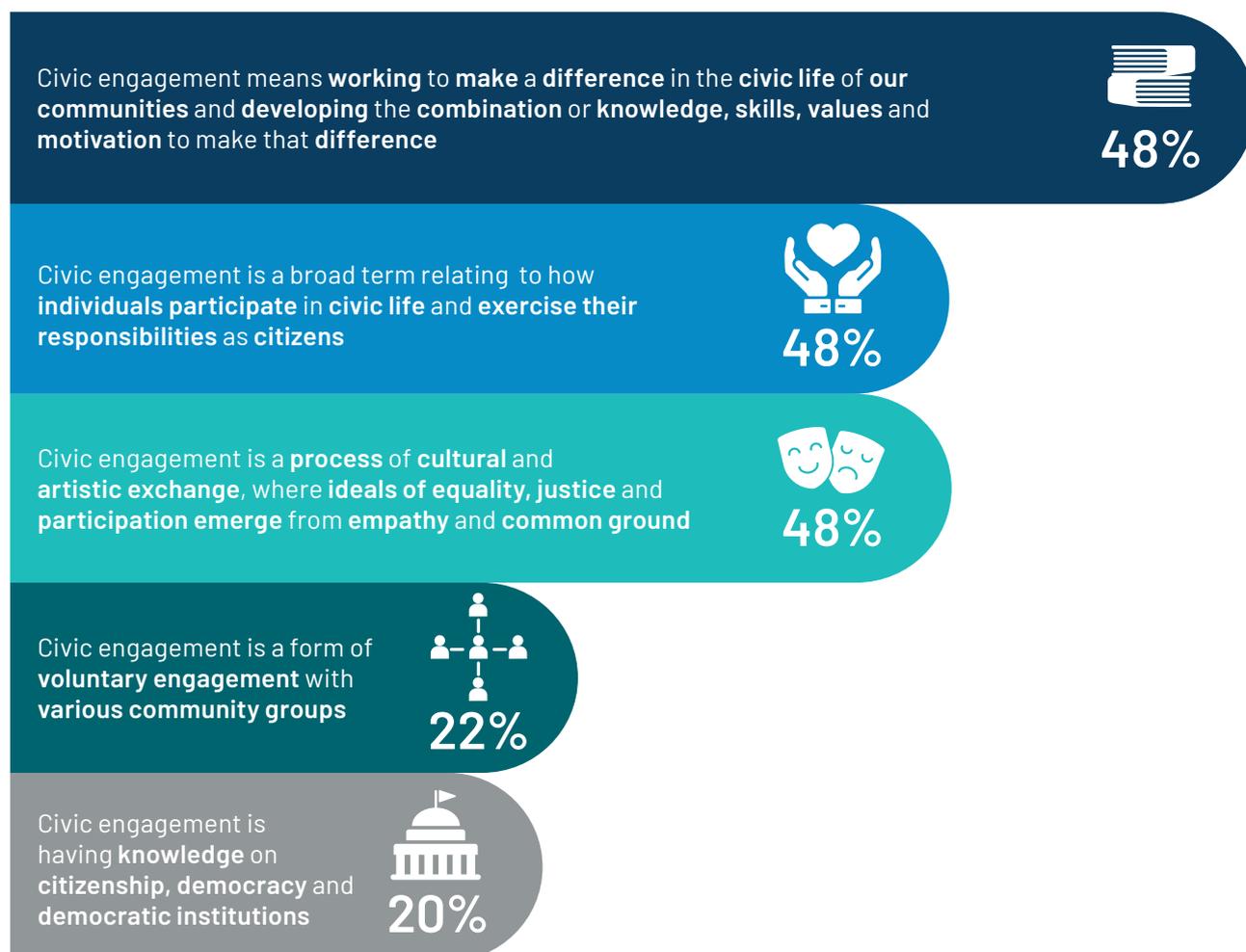
This chapter presents the survey results in relation to each exploratory research question. The findings provide an indication of current practices in Victorian Independent schools concerning the relationship between arts education and civic engagement of students. They also provide rich context to the literature explored in the preceding section of this report.

## To what extent do educators perceive a relationship between civic engagement and arts education?

We began the survey by asking respondents to select any of five potential options which best described their opinion of what it meant to be civically engaged. The average number of selections was two out of the five options presented.

As shown in Figure 1, working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference was the most common answer. Two thirds of participants thought that this best described their opinion of what it means to be civically engaged.

Figure 1: Which of the following best describes your opinion of what it means to be 'civically engaged'?



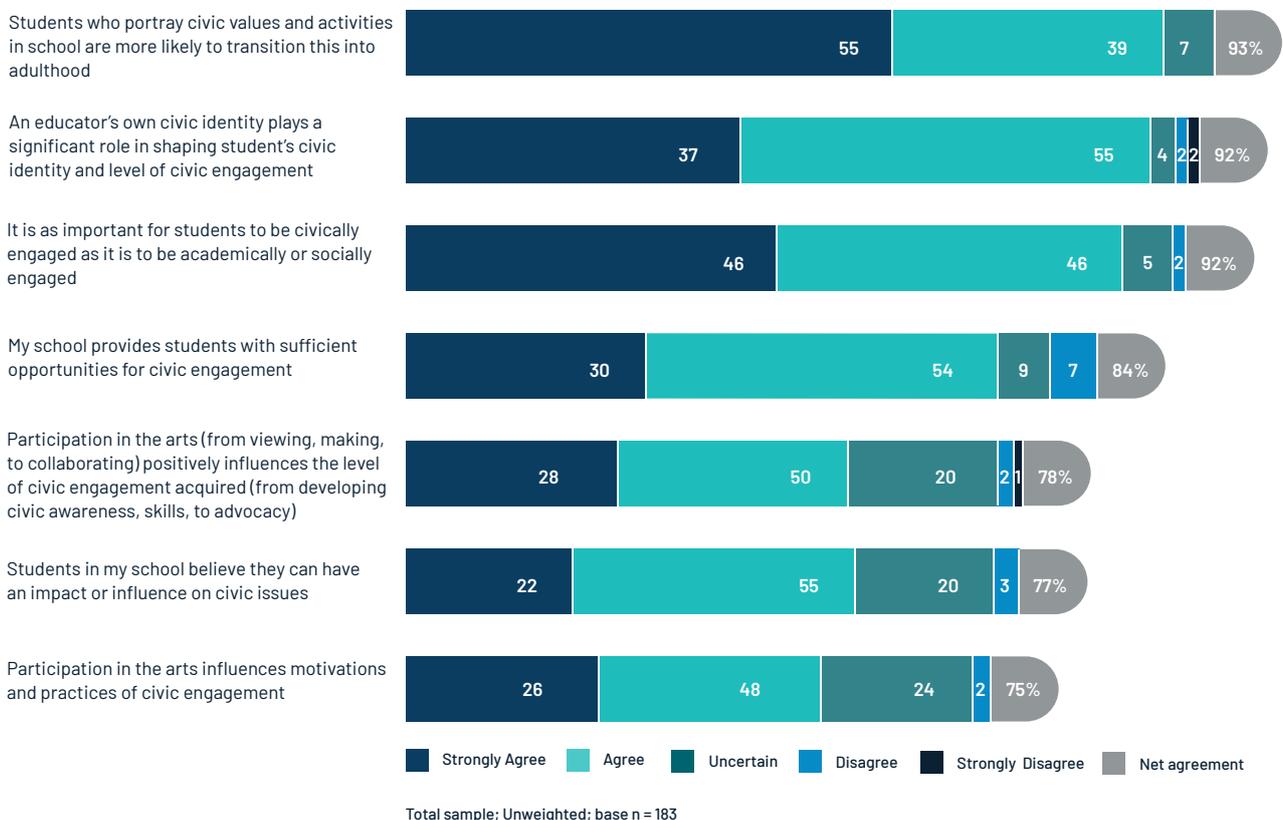
Total sample: Unweighted; base n = 183

In relation to the role of arts in developing civic engagement of students, around half of respondents agreed that civic engagement is a process of cultural and artistic exchange. This suggests that educators who responded to the survey are somewhat conscious of the role culture and the arts play in shaping and forming civic identity. Further still, only two in 10 respondents indicated that civic engagement is having knowledge on citizenship, democracy and democratic institutions.

This indicates that the educators surveyed see civic engagement as more than a matter of formal rights and responsibilities. When unpacking the information above it is clear that respondents believed that civic engagement:

- involves art and culture
- results in making a difference to community.

**Figure 2: Please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.**



This recognition of the broad nature of civic engagement supports Kuttner (2015), Dolby (2003) and Scott's (1990) arguments that more informal avenues to express civic engagement and participate in civic debate, such as art and culture, are equally important as responsibilities like participating in formal civic activities such as voting.

We also asked participants to rate on a five-point scale their agreement or disagreement with several statements exploring educator perceptions into the relationship between civic engagement and the arts.

Three-quarters of respondents (75 per cent) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *participation in the arts influences motivations and practices of civic engagement*, while 78 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *participation in the arts (from viewing, making, to collaborating) positively influences the level of civic engagement acquired*.

These results provide additional weight to the finding that the link between civic engagement and the arts is clear among educators surveyed. However, this finding was somewhat tempered when we viewed results by various participant demographics. For instance, we found that participants who indicated that civic learning activities involve art in their school were significantly more likely to agree with the statement *participation in the arts positively influences the level of civic engagement acquired* (85 per cent vs. 62 per cent) and that their school *provides students with sufficient opportunities for civic engagement* (90 per cent vs. 70 per cent).

Differences were also observed around the socioeconomic status (SES) of the school. Of the 51 respondents who strongly agreed with the statement *participation in the arts positively influences the level of civic engagement acquired*, 50 per cent were from schools with a high SES score, compared to 26 per cent from schools with a medium SES score and 18 per cent from schools with a low SES score.

The conclusion we can draw from these results is that while some educators can see the link between the arts and civic engagement, this is not uniform. For those surveyed in this study, a pre-disposition to the arts – both at the school and individual level – and the socioeconomic status of the school may influence the strength of this view.

# What do educators believe are the most important purposes of school-based civic learning experiences?

To explore what educators believe are the most important purposes of school-based civic learning experiences, we listed 16 civic learning activities and asked participants to select up to five items that they perceived as essential for students.

When responding to the question concerning what it means to be civically engaged (see figure 1), approximately half of all respondents selected the option that *civic engagement is a process of cultural and artistic exchange where ideals of equality, justice and participation emerge from empathy and common ground*. However, responses to figure 3 outlining which civic learning opportunities are important did not entirely reflect this view.

**Figure 3: Which of the following civic learning experiences do you believe are important?**



While art-related civic learning experiences received a positive rating (66 per cent), participants perceived these experiences as less important compared with non-art civic learning experiences (a net of 100 per cent). Specifically, 45 per cent of participants selected *participating in artistic endeavours and/or cultural practices* as important (5th out of 16th in ranking), a third (33 per cent) selected *joining excursions or incursions focused on culture and art* (8th of 16th in ranking) and 16 per cent selected *civically-oriented art making experiences* as important (13th of 16 in ranking). Civic learning experiences considered most important tended to be altruistic, such as volunteering in the community and raising funds for charity.

This suggests that while the important role of art and culture in creating civic engagement is recognised, the benefits of providing civic learning opportunities focused on art are perhaps not as well understood. Unsurprisingly, participants who indicated they were 'heavily' or 'moderately' involved in the arts in their work were significantly more likely to indicate that participating in artistic endeavours and/or cultural practices is important for students (55 per cent vs. 27 per cent 'slightly' or 'not at all' professionally involved in the arts).

Similarly, participants who 'strongly agreed' that participation in the arts influences motivations and practices of civic engagement were significantly more likely to indicate that *participating in artistic endeavours and/or cultural practices* is important for students (67 per cent vs. 38 per cent agree and 37 per cent disagree or uncertain).

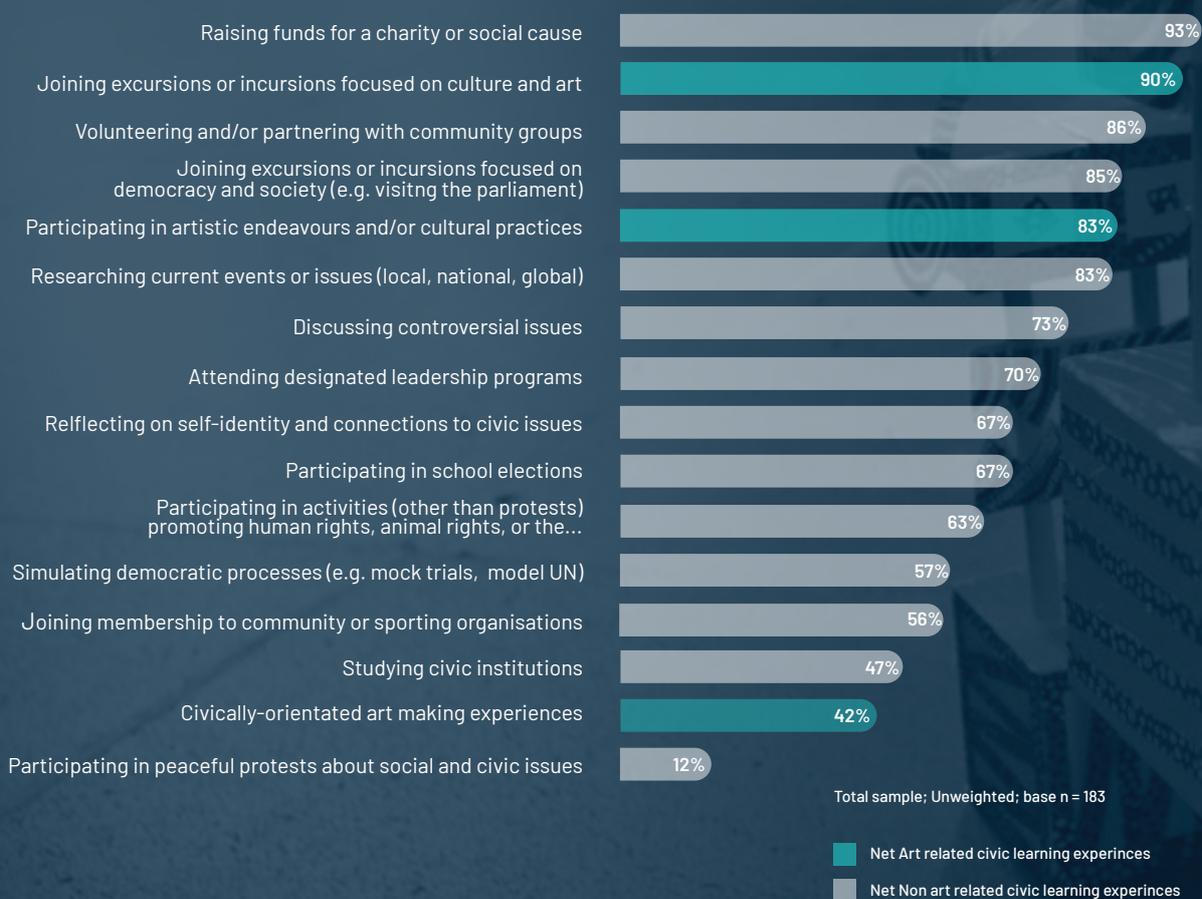
While no significant differences were observed, those who selected art-related civic learning experiences as important were more likely to be:

- Art teachers (80 per cent vs. 58 per cent non-art teachers).
- Non-leaders in school (83 per cent vs. 63 per cent leaders including principals).
- Teaching staff (75 per cent vs. 58 per cent principals and 57 per cent non-teaching staff).
- High SES schools (79 per cent vs. 64 per cent medium SES and 55 per cent low SES).

The third least important civic learning activity nominated in figure 3 was *studying civic institutions*, selected by less than a tenth of respondents. This finding is at odds with what is given priority by education systems across the globe, which Ainley and Friedman (2012) suggest is typically content knowledge on civic institutions and governmental processes.

We also asked respondents to select which of these types of civic learning opportunities they offer to students. This question aimed to contrast what educators believe is important and what occurs in relation to civic engagement and learning within schools.

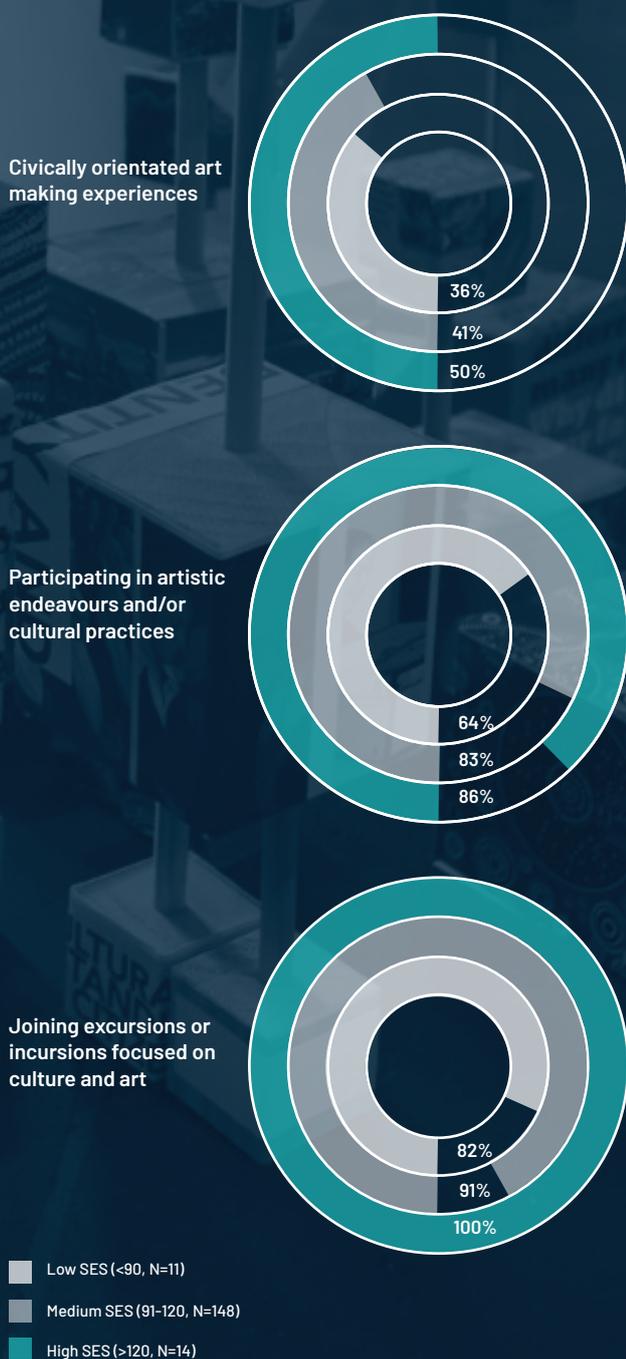
**Figure 4: Which of the following civic learning opportunities does your school provide to students?**



The most common civic learning opportunities provided to students were a mixture of altruistic activities and excursions and incursions into the community. Raising funds for charity of social cause (93 per cent), followed by joining excursions or incursions focused on culture and art (90 per cent), volunteering and/or partnering with community groups (86 per cent), and joining excursions or incursions focused on democracy and society (85 per cent).

There was an equal split between those who selected art-related civic activities and those who selected non-art related activities (net 97 per cent vs. net 98 per cent).

**Figure 5: Select civic learning opportunities offered by school socioeconomic background**



Among all art-related civic activities, the majority of participants indicated that *excursions or incursions focused on culture and art and artistic endeavours and/or cultural practices* were provided to students (90 per cent and 83 per cent). However, only two out of five (42 per cent) indicated that their school provided *civically orientated art making experiences*. This may suggest that civically oriented activities exclusively involving art are less prominent across Victorian Independent schools, compared with civically oriented activities related to culture.

Unsurprisingly, those who indicated that their school was 'heavily' or 'moderately' invested in the arts were significantly more likely to indicate that *participating in artistic endeavours and/or cultural practices* was provided to students in their school (87 per cent vs. 53 per cent 'slightly' or 'not at all' invested).

As illustrated in figure 5, the socioeconomic status of the school also played a part in the types of civic learning activities offered to students.

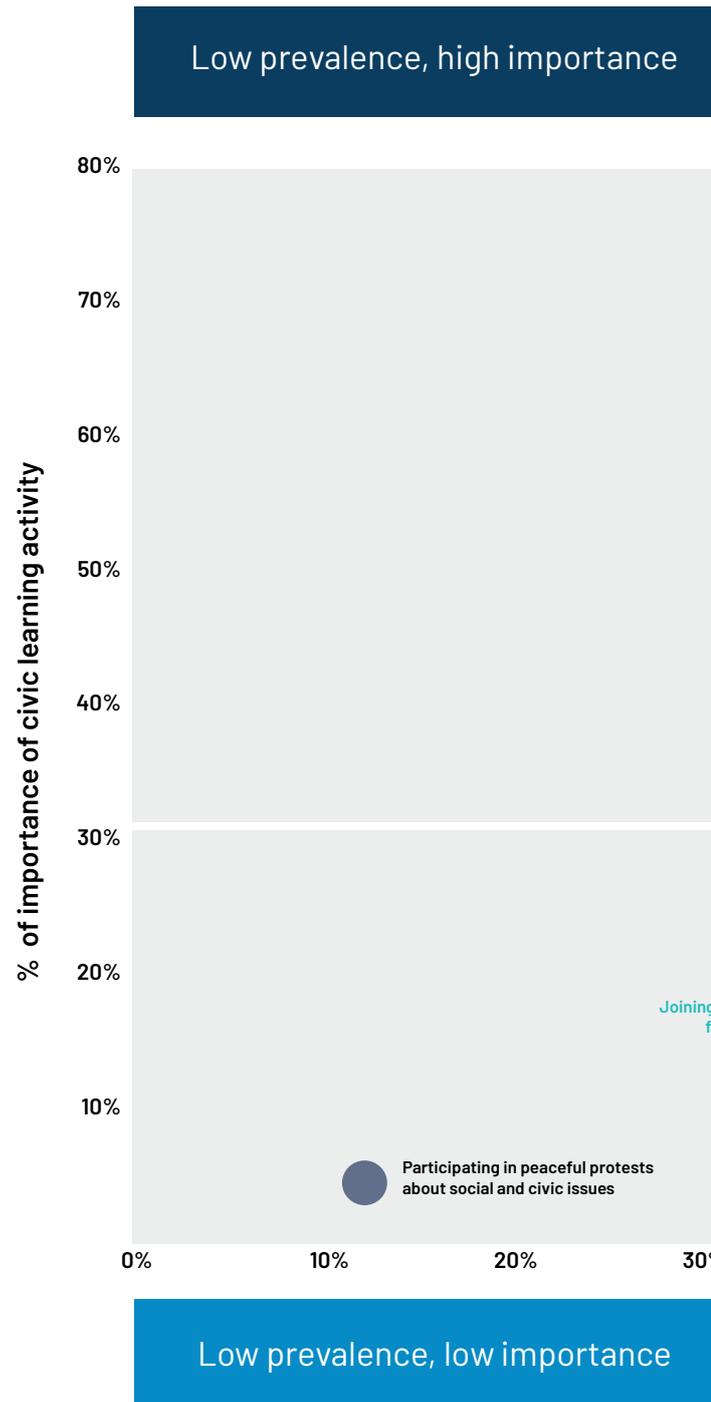
There was an observable difference between SES categories for the amount of *civically orientated art making experiences* provided to students with scores on average nine per cent higher in high and medium SES schools than low SES schools. Respondents in high and medium SES schools also indicated that they were more likely to offer students the chance to *join excursions focused on culture and art* (scores on average 13 per cent higher in high and medium SES schools) and to *participate in artistic endeavours and/or cultural practices* (scores on average 21 per cent high in high and medium SES schools).

## Civic learning activities: importance and prevalence in schools

We combined these two survey items to provide an indication of what types of civic learning experiences are considered important and occur regularly.

The matrix here depicts the relationship between the prevalence of a civic learning activity and its importance. Two lines are placed in the median of each variable creating four quadrants. The top right quadrant indicates the civic learning activities that were perceived as highly prevalent and highly important, while the bottom left quadrant denotes activities that were deemed to be of low importance and low prevalence.

In relation to our question around the role of arts education in schools in developing more civically engaged students, *participating in artistic endeavours and/or cultural practices* and *joining excursions or incursions focused on culture and art* are both positioned in the top right quadrant. Respondents deemed these two activities – which relate to what the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2018b) refer to as responding to art – as both important and prevalent in schools.



High prevalence, high importance



High prevalence, low importance

However, the item *civically oriented art making experiences* was perceived to be of low prevalence and low importance. This suggests there is a difference between how respondents view the importance of art making and art responding activities and their relationship with developing civic engagement in students. This is despite Zimmerman (2010) and Freedman (2003) having both demonstrated a clear link between civic engagement and both art making and responding.

Why were the *art responding* activities highly prevalent and important to respondents yet the *art making* activities lower in importance and frequency? More research is required to explain this finding. However, there may be a gap in the information and resources available to teachers within schools that explicitly demonstrates how to link art making and issues of civic and social importance. More education and further awareness raising among schools may also assist in highlighting this apparent disparity between the two concepts.

The item *reflecting on self-identity and connections to civic issues*, positioned in the top left-hand quadrant, is a civic learning opportunity deemed as highly important but something that occurs relatively infrequently in schools. The development of one's identity is a multidimensional, complex psychological progression that occurs through reflection and interpretation resulting in the eventual conceptualisation of the self (Hammack, 2015).

This process takes centre-stage predominantly during adolescence (Erikson, 1959; Grotevant, 1987; Watts and Flanagan, 2007). The fact that educators consider this important, yet it occurs occasionally in comparison to other civic learning opportunities, is a significant finding for teachers, school leaders and education systems alike, as it provides an opportunity to link arts education, identity development and civic engagement.

The type of authentic learning experiences that the arts can provide encourages personalised learning and the exploration of purpose and identity development among students. Such learning experiences are important to connect ones education to broader ideas of civic engagement espoused by Erlich (2000) and others.

There is an opportunity here for further research that explores in detail the nexus between arts education, identity development and civic engagement. This may determine if, and how, arts education can become a platform for reflecting on self-identity and connections to civic issues within schools.

From the analysis of the survey items earlier we can draw some important conclusions. Within participating schools, civic learning opportunities often go beyond institutional focussed activities like excursions to parliaments and learning activities focused on democracy. There is evidence that educators involved in this study also look to altruistic activities such as volunteering and community engagement to teach students about civic issues.

However, explicitly involving the arts in the teaching and learning of civic issues and as an avenue to increase civic engagement is less common, particularly in schools where arts is less of a focus or schools that service low socio-economic communities.

# In what ways, if at all, do students' civic learning activities involve, make use of, or draw on art?

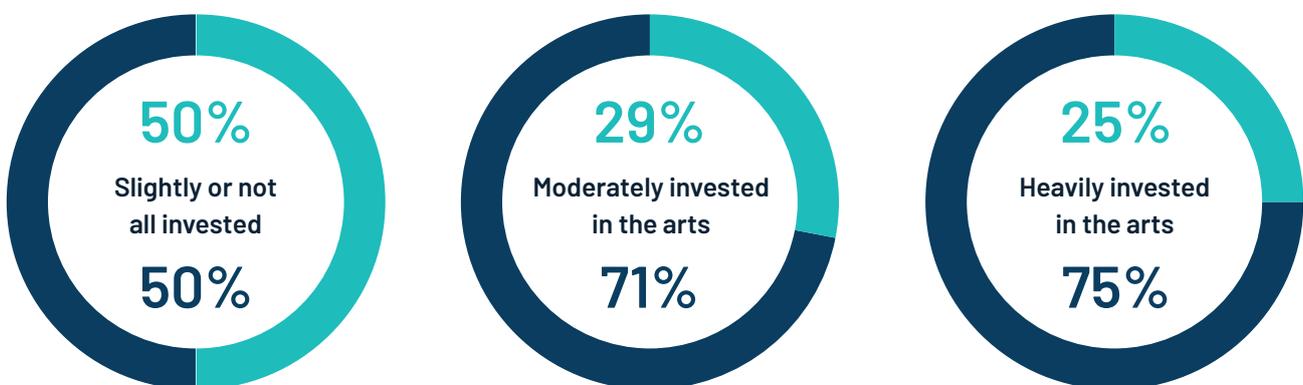
When asked how civic engagement is taught at schools, the most common answer was through *co-curricular activities* (73 per cent) followed by through *humanities and social sciences* (68 per cent) and *integrated into other learning areas* (62 per cent). Only six per cent of responses reported that civic engagement is taught as a stand-alone dedicated subject.

Almost three quarters of respondents (71 per cent) suggested that, in teaching civic engagement, their school involved, made use of or drew upon art for civic learning activities. Participants who agreed with the question that their school provides students with sufficient opportunities for civic engagement were significantly more likely to indicate that their school made use of the arts in teaching civic engagement (76 per cent net agree vs. 45 per cent uncertain or net disagree).

Breaking this down further, it appears that the level of investment in the arts is also a strong predictor of whether art is involved in the development of civic engagement of students. As shown in figure 6, the proportion of schools providing opportunities for students to engage in civic learning activities that make use of or draw on art increased significantly depending on the school's investment in the arts.

When we exclude respondents in non-teaching positions, slightly less indicated that their school made use of or drew upon the arts for civic learning opportunities (65 per cent for non-art teachers and 67 per cent for arts teachers). We asked art teachers in the schools that draw upon art for civic learning activities to nominate the type of activities available to students.

Figure 6: Civic learning opportunities provided to students by investment in the arts



Total sample; Unweighted; base n = 181

■ No - civic learning activities make use of art  
■ Yes - civic learning activities make use of art

**Table 3: In your school or setting, do students participate in any of the following activities that involve both art and civic learning?**

	N=37	%
Making a work of art with an explicit civic intention or theme	30	81%
Viewing and engaging with civic dimensions of art <sup>1</sup>	28	76%
Collaborating with others to conceptualise and/or create civically themed art	19	51%
Participating in a civically themed work of art conceived of/made by someone else	13	35%
None of the above	2	5%
Don't know	2	5%

Note: low sample size, read data with caution

Most art teachers in schools that use art to provide civic learning opportunities indicated that they offer students opportunities to *make a work of art with an explicit civic intention or theme* (81 per cent), or opportunities to *view and engage with civic dimensions of art* (76 per cent). The qualitative comments we received to the survey and the interview data confirm this finding. We uncovered a consistent theme of respondents using art to explore issues prevalent in society and to stimulate discussion and reflection on such issues:

*...Art pieces have been used to stimulate discussion on varying topics. Students have studied Australian artists, looking at our natural environment and how artists have portrayed the changes and damage to our environment...*

While such examples were common, instances where schools take the next step and create civically themed art were much less frequent:

*...Students who do an art unit at senior school are heavily involved in exploring controversial issues. They are encouraged to use art as a platform to explore issues. They also look at artists from the past and present who have used their own art to make a commentary on society. Yearly we have a contemporary artist come to the college to interview students on their understanding of the values of society today...*

These results suggest the most common approaches to incorporating the arts into civic learning activities relied on a more surface level approach of viewing and engaging with art, and less so in constructing deeper, more authentic art experiences such as participating and collaborating to create civically themed art.

<sup>1</sup> Includes viewing art with an explicitly civic theme and viewing art in a way that brings out or raises civic themes, even if the work isn't explicitly civically themed. Also includes investigating, exploring or discussing civic issues raised by art.



Respondents provided some useful suggestions on how to better connect art and civic learning. One theme related to embedding civic engagement in the planning stage of any work unit. Another common idea was for educators to be intentional and purposeful in the provocations, stimulus and learning experiences they provide to students.

A common thread among respondents centred around ensuring that art projects were authentic and grounded in community. Projects grounded in community (either local or global) provide students with authentic learning experiences by creating opportunity for reflection and to deeply understand and express their own identity within the wider community.

As noted above, the chance to reflect on self-identity and connections to civic issues was considered by educators as highly important but something that occurs relatively infrequently in schools. The arts can potentially play a role in increasing the frequency of activities that develop students' civic identity.

A final theme uncovered through the interviews and survey comments related to the role of school leaders and school structures. Educators also felt that the level of priority school leaders place on connecting the arts and civic engagement will determine its success.

# What obstacles or challenges do educators perceive for including opportunities for students to connect art and civic learning?

Educators face some consistent challenges to link arts education and civic learning opportunities in schools. These barriers are typically institutional or systemic, however barriers were also interpersonal or related to interactions between educators.

The most common institutional barrier was time. For several educators, the time required to foster relationships with other educators, artists and/or community groups was a severe limitation to connecting the arts with civic learning opportunities for students:

**...Time, logistics of engaging meaningfully with community groups, existing curriculum and reporting, current timetable structure (a collapsed timetable on occasions might facilitate this more readily)...**

Building greater linkages between educators and the broader community may require school leaders to carve out time for teachers to prioritise this type of activity.

A second institutional barrier raised throughout the survey relates to the philosophy or ethos of the school. Students challenging particular social, cultural or political issues may rub against the dominant socio-political views of the parent and school community:

**...Confronting issues can be difficult to approach with children and some parents do not always approve of teachers introducing these to their children...**

While not as prevalent for respondents as the issue focusing on time, this barrier requires consideration from school leaders wishing to adopt a greater synergy between arts and the civic engagement of students.

A common suggestion to address this issue from survey respondents was that students require the space and psychological safety to express their own views – even if their views do not align neatly with the ethos or philosophy of the school.

The most prevalent systemic barrier to emerge from the survey analysis related to the delivery of the Australian curriculum. This issue concerns the material dictated by the Australian Government to teachers concerning educational content. Teachers who provided commentary around the survey felt that the structure of the curriculum was too rigid and too tightly constrained to add additional teaching modules that connected the arts with other areas of the curriculum:

**...A crowded curriculum (is the biggest obstacle)... time to plan and implement a program that has a civics focus...**

As discussed during the literature review, mandated curriculum relating to civic engagement across the developed world is often heavily slanted toward the teaching of an institutional view of civic engagement, where knowledge is confined to parliament, democracy and the rule of law. Without looking at broader notions of what it means to be civically engaged in the twenty-first century, we run the risk of producing more of the same results concerning civic engagement in students.

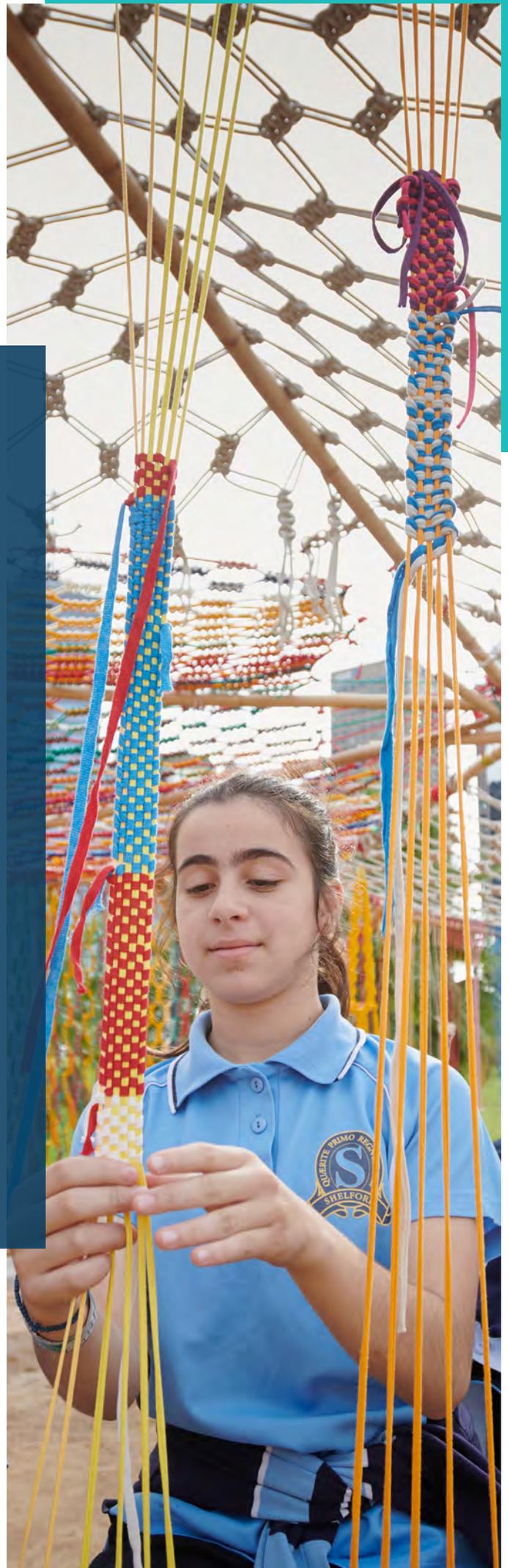
A final barrier consistently raised throughout the survey and follow-up interviews related to the connections between teachers across disciplines and the sometimes-negative stigma that exists around the value of the arts:

...I believe I teach one of the most important subjects in the curriculum (Drama), yet other people look at it as a joke. Like we really get less credibility than PE. I can't tell you how poorly drama is considered...

Some respondents we interviewed suggested that good personal relationships between individual teachers can often overcome this barrier. However, such instances are dependent on interpersonal relationships. The ever-present danger is that once key people in the relationship move on, the activity will cease:

...I don't have a lot of connection with science or maths, although there is the science in drama competition that our school used to be involved in but when that science teacher who was interested in that left, that stopped...

The above challenges impede the development of civic learning opportunities that use the arts to develop common and shared meaning of society among students. They also act as a disincentive for schools to explore the role arts can play in the development of a civic and social identity in what is an important, malleable period of students' development.



# Discussion and implications



The findings throughout this report indicate that civic learning curriculum frameworks across the world are failing to keep pace with the changing ways adolescents participate in civic life. Comparative analysis of education systems across 28 nations in 2016 concluded that civic engagement among young people has declined to worrying levels (Ainsley & Friedman, 2012; McGowan, 2017; Schulz et al., 2016). This is despite social media connecting our youth to a new 'global civic commons' where issues of civic importance are less constrained by national borders than ever before.

Across the education systems compared in the literature review by Ainsley and Friedman (2012) and others, civic engagement is still taught using predominantly a narrow institutional model. We argue that a largely institutional approach is no longer enough to equip students with the ability to develop and refine the skills, characteristics and values required to confront the challenges of today. We are not suggesting that the institutional approach to teaching civic and citizenship is no longer valid: it remains an integral building block for students to understand their civic duties and the fundamental underpinnings of society. Yet this approach is rooted in twentieth century attitudes of what it means to be civically engaged. It is also discordant to the digital age, where the flow of information across social media platforms provide different approaches to thinking about and engaging with civic issues.

Equally important in our post-modern world is the exploration of civic issues through a social and cultural framework that includes the arts as a way of making sense of important civic issues. The Australian curriculum, while providing guidance on general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities concerning civics and citizenship, appears thin on this front.

The findings throughout this study reveal that there is an opportunity to use the arts to bridge the gap between the institutional view of civics common in today's curriculum and the broader sociocultural aspects of participating in civic discourse. Combining arts education with other subjects and disciplines such as History, English and Humanities can assist students to weave together the complex threads of diverse viewpoints, experiences and historical and cultural contexts to create shared meaning and common value on issues of civic importance.

The significant examples cited throughout this research demonstrate that linking the arts with civic learning would create opportunities to increase civic engagement among our youth. This could provide more space for active participation in the civic realm through the lens of art and popular culture to supplement teachings around democracy and the parliamentary system, and the excursions into community that schools currently provide students. However, without greater support to connect these two concepts through the curriculum – to provide guidance to teachers and school leaders on why and how to involve the arts in creating civic learning opportunities – it is difficult to see this type of widespread change across the Australian education system.

Alongside creating space in the curriculum for an expanded approach to teaching civics and citizenship involving the arts, policymakers and education systems can also extend the knowledge of the link between the two concepts through the creation of tools, frameworks and other resources that are currently missing from the education landscape.

Doing so would serve two distinct purposes. First, it would shine a spotlight on:

1. the need for an expanded definition on what it means to participate in civic discourse and be civically engaged
2. the role the arts can play in this pursuit.

Second, it would provide educators with a platform from which to start; a set of ideas on how to see and create linkages between the arts and other disciplines involved in teaching civic engagement. This would enable educators to see how and where to engage students in the broader sociocultural elements of civic engagement that are an increasing presence in the twenty-first century.

The challenge to increase civic engagement of students and to rethink the way in which we teach civics and citizenship does not sit solely on the shoulders of policy makers and curriculum bodies. School leaders and teachers, who ultimately design the civic learning activities available to students, also have an important role to play in linking civic learning with the arts. We found that respondents who selected art-related civic learning experiences as important were more likely to be arts teachers, less likely to school leaders, more likely to be teaching staff, and more likely to be in high SES schools. If a greater ground swell of support for using the arts to support civic engagement is to grow organically among schools, it requires champions that teach disciplines other than the arts.

School leaders may also need to play a more active role in finding non-arts teachers who are willing to take up this cause and show leadership to embed this concept throughout the entire staff room.

Our review of the literature uncovered ample evidence from around the world showing increased civic engagement when the arts is used to explore civic issues, but limited evidence of a systemic linking of these concepts in formal education. This was confirmed in our survey results, which suggest that participants understand the relationship between the arts and civic engagement. However, concrete action on this front is somewhat dependent on certain characteristics, such as the school's investment in the arts, the personal investment in the arts from teachers, and the SES characteristics of the school.

Art-related civic learning experiences were, in general, perceived as less important compared with non-art civic learning experiences. Similarly, civically oriented activities involving art are less prominent across Victorian Independent schools than other, non-art focused activities. When arts was linked with the teaching of civics and citizenship, the most common approaches uncovered through the survey relied on a more surface level approach of viewing and engaging with art, and less so in constructing deeper, more authentic art experiences such as participating and collaborating to create civically themed art. We suggest that there is a lack of tools, frameworks, resources, information and concrete examples that explicitly help school leaders and teachers to link art making activities to issues of civic and social importance.

In other words, while there are pockets of good practice in schools in relation to expanding the teaching of civic engagement to include the arts, there are also many schools where the link between these two concepts is not as well developed.

The obvious barriers around time and resources play a part in why there are only pockets of strong performance, as do the contributing factors around SES, personal relationships and investment in the arts. There is also a perception challenge facing the arts. While not new, we found evidence that suggests some teachers still view art as a 'soft' discipline that is not as important as numeracy, literacy, science and other foundational disciplines. We see the integration of the arts into other subjects through civic learning as a potential option to remove some of the stigma that remains around the importance of the arts in a young person's education. Through co-constructing civic learning experiences between the arts and foundational disciplines, teachers may have a greater appreciation for the importance of the arts in developing the skills critical to ensuring that students can seize the opportunities afforded to us through the fourth industrial revolution.



# Conclusion

THE SOLUTION  
IS NOT THE  
TECHNOLOGY.  
IT'S THE  
PEOPLE  
WHO USE IT!

ULTS CAN

WE  
ALO

We began this study with a question: what role can arts education play in fostering greater civic engagement in students? Our findings suggest that arts education has a key role to play in improving current levels of civic engagement through the use of the arts to explore broader sociocultural aspects of civic engagement.

The results of this study suggest that this concept is potentially undernourished in many schools, that it is fluid and dependent on individual relationships and teachers and leaders invested in the arts. While the evidence points to the benefits that accrue to students and society by using the arts as a vehicle to expand our notions of civic learning and civic engagement, the connection between arts and civic learning within schools remains ad hoc.

The challenge to education systems is to rethink curriculum frameworks concerning civics and citizenship to ensure greater alignment to the twenty-first century's notions of civic engagement. This will require policymakers to shift their gaze from issues of national civic importance to provide greater consideration to the interconnected global issues that students will increasingly encounter. It may also require education systems to think about the ways that young people engage with civic issues through popular culture, art and digital technologies. School leaders wishing to link these two concepts for civic learning opportunities in their own context

may need to reconsider approaches to implementing civic learning in schools. Combining arts and other subjects to interrogate sociocultural issues by bringing students, teachers, artists and other actors together can assist in developing critical thinking and complex problem-solving skills in students. It can also foster a new approach to civic engagement that creates formal, structured processes for participating in civic discourse. This would enable students to practise civic engagement at a more meaningful, personal and authentic level using the familiar digital mediums and cultural and artistic references.

Alongside parents, families and peers, educators play a vital role in helping young people craft thoughtful civic identities that allow them to engage with issues of civic importance in a more balanced, subtle and reflective manner. Involving the arts in this process will provide the youth of today with the agility required to become the global problem solvers we need to navigate the transition into the new century.

## Limitations and further research

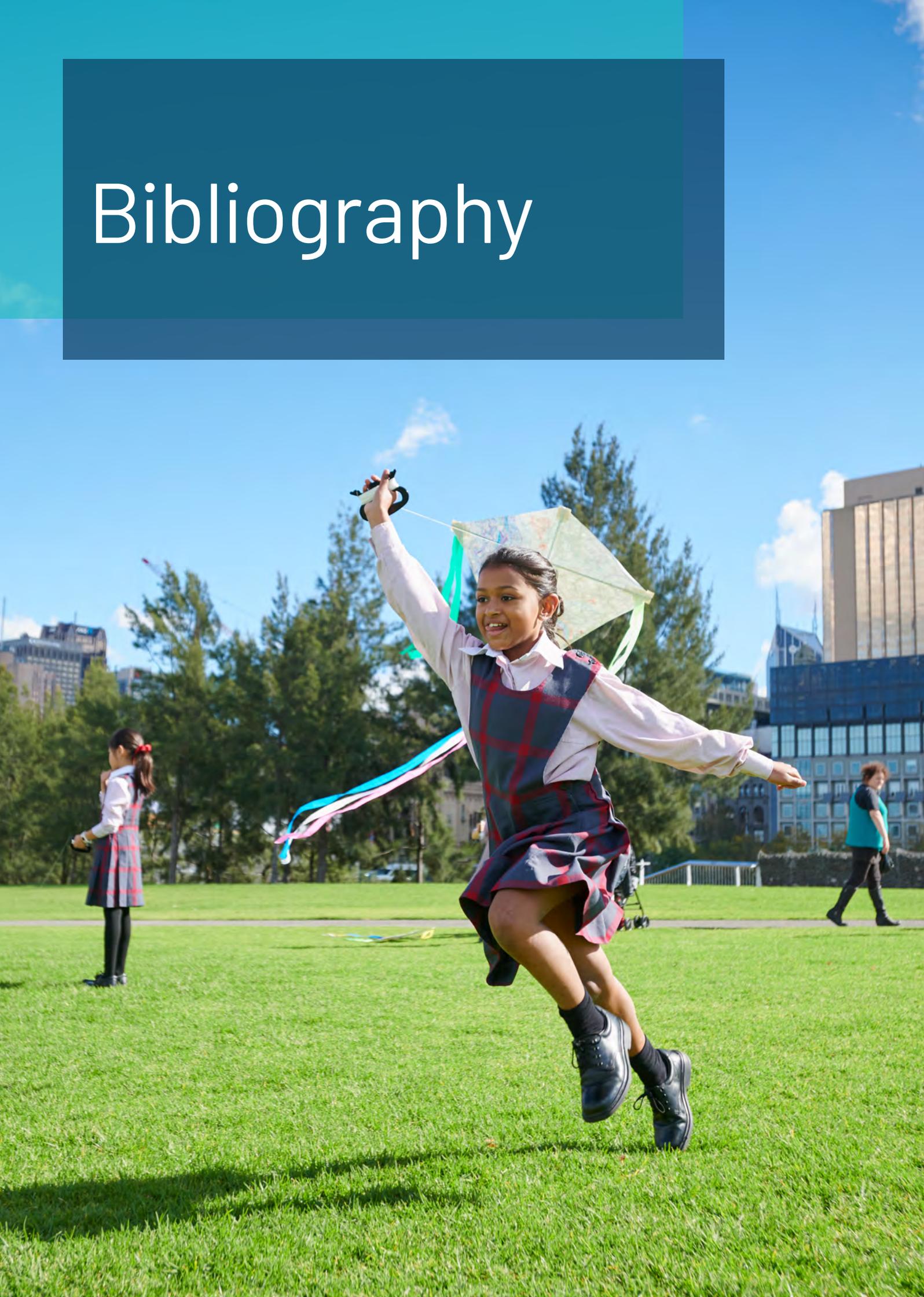
There are several limitations to our study. In the first instance, the survey sample was limited to Independent schools in Victoria only. If the sample was expanded to include schools from outer state and territories and the Government and Catholic education sectors, it is possible that the results may change.

Secondly, the sample of Independent schools itself had a bias toward medium SES schools and a slight over-representation from schools with large enrolments. Finally, response rates when filtered by certain characteristics were small and should be taken into consideration when interpreting these results.

Despite these limitations, the role of arts education and its link to civic engagement is an area fertile for further study. Potential future research angles could include the:

- relationship between arts education, identity development and civic engagement
- potential for the arts to assist students to develop personal values, purpose and a social identity
- differences between art making and art responding in relation to the development of civic engagement
- impact of individual projects and case studies that explicitly link the concepts of art education and civic engagement in schools.

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