

MEDIA RELEASE

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Teaching citizenship skills may prevent civil conflict

Australia must build people's skills for citizenship as well as work, says Monash University Professor of Education Terri Seddon.

Recent policy reform has emphasised skills for work but forgotten to consider how people develop skills for citizenship, Professor Seddon will tell the ACER research conference on Monday.

The primary goal of schooling is to prepare young people for productive and responsible adult lives as workers and citizens, she contends.

Schooling also disciplines individuals in ways of knowing, interacting with others and using power as equal and responsible decision makers in citizen-communities.

Examples of civil conflict in recent years, such as 2005's Cronulla riots, show that some young people are not using this power in a responsible way. This suggests a breakdown in the function of education to teach citizenship skills, yet there has been little action on tackling the development of these skills.

"Violence in Australia despite a booming economy and an assertive government is a stark reminder that nations have to be made and remade culturally, as well as economically. An identity as citizen is as important as an identity as worker in forming sustainable communities that transcend social and cultural divisions and conflicts," says Professor Seddon.

"Young people must learn citizenship skills if they are to exercise power responsibly. The way citizenship skills are taught and learned, and the way citizen action is endorsed and authorised, influences the construction of individual and community identities.

"Citizenship skills must be not just explicitly taught but also effectively modelled within educational institutions," she says. This has implications for teaching expertise – the way it is organised, endorsed and authorised in schooling, society and in diverse workplaces and community settings where people learn.

"If teachers model practices of power based on domination and subordination, which are often experienced as bullying and compliance, is it surprising that young people play out bullying practices?"

Terri Seddon is Professor of Education at Monash University.

The ACER Research Conference 2008, on the theme *Touching the Future: Building skills for life and work*, takes place in Brisbane from 10 to 12 August.

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