

# **Teacher and learner perceptions of student-initiated active citizenship in primary schools**

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**DECLARATION**

I certify that this dissertation contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any institute, college or university. In addition, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the dissertation.

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Mellina C. Scavone

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### **Abstract**

Active citizenship is an important aspect of global education, assisting students to develop the understanding that they can make a difference in the world, as well as encouraging students to develop empathy, self-confidence and moral thinking. Whilst active citizenship can assist students in their preparation for the future, it is rarely occurring to its full extent in schools. Research shows that students in Australian primary schools generally take a secondary role in active citizenship, participating most frequently in teacher-chosen projects, rudimentary service learning or no projects at all, rather than being a part of the decision-making process. Considerable benefits have been reported for students when they take an active and informed role in meaningful projects, such as a feeling of empowerment, a sense of pride, greater self-esteem, and positive effects on schoolwork and mood.

This study aimed to uncover perceptions of student-initiated active citizenship, from the viewpoints of students, school staff and volunteers in two Australian primary schools. The study also sought teacher and school staff perceptions of the relevance of student-initiated active citizenship, gaining an indication of how much space teachers feel is in the curriculum for active citizenship opportunities in the upper primary classroom. The research is a partial replication of Hannam's pilot study into the impact of student participation in secondary schools in England, but on a smaller scale, concentrating only on the impact for schools and school communities. This phenomenological study took a qualitative approach to data collection, focusing on understanding participants' lived experience of active citizenship through semi-structured interviews.

The findings from this study revealed that students perceived the experience of benefits such as enhanced mood, changes in their way of thinking and feeling pride in themselves. Teachers perceived the most beneficial aspects of the students' active citizenship to be the development of important life skills, and students learning to make decisions and act independently. Teachers perceived the difficulties being that active citizenship is time consuming, and the students observed the organisational aspects of their projects to be the most significant difficulty. Overall, the data revealed that students and school staff perceive great benefits from students participating in informed active citizenship projects.



### Operational definitions

**Active citizenship** is about being an active citizen. Active citizens initiate change for the better, fight against unwanted change and seek for a more just world (Jerome, 2012; Lawson, 2001; Hannam, 2001).

**Citizenship education** aims to teach students how to be active, informed, empathetic and effective citizens, and build the relevant skills, values, knowledge and dispositions in preparation for the future (Prior, Mellor & Withers, 2001), through a variety of authentic and classroom learning opportunities.

**Student-initiated** implies that students have a voice and influence in their action projects, rather than participating in teacher-chosen projects.

**Service learning** is a teaching and learning strategy where students engage in meaningful community service and/or fundraising activities. Service learning can occur without active citizenship when students participate in community service without understanding the change they are seeking and why.

**Social capital** is a sociological term relating to the networks and contacts one develops in an effective functioning society. Education is believed to be a way to gain social capital (Print & Coleman, 2003).

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

This chapter presents a background and an introduction to the research project. Within this chapter, the research question is discussed and the significance of the study is described. The importance of citizenship education has been identified, as have the life skills that active citizenship fosters, but action opportunities are reportedly being neglected or downplayed in the curriculum. This study aimed to provide insight into the impacts that can occur through practicing active citizenship at an upper primary school level, as well as the most significant difficulties in the implementation of action opportunities, from the perspectives of school staff and students.

#### Background

Student-initiated active citizenship is slowly becoming more prominent around the world, with some schools beginning to allow students to have voice within the scope of taking action to seek change. The increase in student-initiated active citizenship could be credited to much recent literature indicating the importance of active citizenship in schools (Jonson-Reid, 2010; Jerome, 2012). Although there is currently limited literature relating to practicing active citizenship in Australia, this may change soon due to the impending implementation of the civics and citizenship curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2011). This study aimed to uncover the perceptions of the impacts of student-initiated active citizenship in the Australian primary school classroom and beyond, from a student and school staff point of view. It provides insight into whether and how some schools are implementing active citizenship and what impact it has for students and the school community.

#### Service learning versus active citizenship

Service learning is a term frequently heard alongside active citizenship, whilst similar, service learning does differ from active citizenship. Service learning is an aspect of citizenship education; it is a teaching and learning strategy in which students engage in meaningful community service (Annette, 2006). This particular strategy is an important feature of active

citizenship; it assists students in learning that they are capable of making a difference through their actions. Active citizenship is a more broad term; it involves students actively seeking change for the better, whilst service learning is about providing a service to the community, such as fundraising, assisting the community through labour or volunteering. Active citizenship and service learning intersect in instances such as young people seeking a range of ways to make a difference including a fundraising activity. Both service learning and active citizenship are important aspects of citizenship education, assisting students to learn empathy and gain the drive and skills to seek change for the better (Annette, 2006). However, service learning is often mistaken for active citizenship and can be used as an opportunity for children to fundraise or complete other community service without knowledge about why they are doing it. Participation must be informed and meaningful to young people in order for it to have any effect on their personal lives (Crick, 2002). Service learning, when used correctly, is an important aspect of active citizenship.

### The problem

The issue that fostered the idea for this research is that much literature has indicated that students are not being given voice when undertaking active citizenship activities, yet students initiating their own action projects has been found to have significant benefits for their personal development, learning and attitudes (Hannam, 2001; Jerome, 2012; Jonson-Reid, 2010). Many relevant studies have been conducted in the United Kingdom and around the world, but there is limited literature about Australian students' participation in active citizenship. The results of one particular study conducted in England uncovered that students taking an active role and having voice in active citizenship benefits them personally, academically and mentally (Hannam, 2001). In his pilot study, Hannam interviewed and surveyed secondary school students, teachers and principals in order to uncover how initiating active citizenship impacted on the students emotionally and educationally (Hannam, 2001). Hannam (2001) was able to gather data that showed some advantages and disadvantages of student-initiated active citizenship. Recorded benefits for students included a sense of independence, empathy, enhanced self-esteem, positive effect on schoolwork and an enhanced relationship between teachers and students (Hannam, 2001). Hannam's findings suggest that the benefits of student-initiated active citizenship strongly outweigh the negatives in secondary schools in the England.

The research conducted in this study was a partial replication of Hannam's study (2001), but on a smaller scale, focusing only on the impact for school communities and students, and conducted in the context of upper primary schools. Hannam's (2001) pilot study motivated this research by showing the considerable benefits experienced by students in secondary school in England, and this research aimed to uncover whether these results are replicable at a primary school level in Australia. The major differences between this study and Hannam's research are that the current study was conducted in primary schools in Tasmania, and used an entirely qualitative approach, whereas Hannam adopted a mixed methods approach. Through a collective study on two upper primary classes in independent schools in the greater Hobart area, Tasmania, the current research aimed to uncover the benefits and obstacles associated with students initiating their own active citizenship projects, as well as school staff views on the effectiveness and relevance of active citizenship in the upper primary classroom.

#### Significance of the problem and the study

Whilst active citizenship is believed to be an important part of preparing students for the future (Hannam, 2001; Jerome, 2012), it occurs rarely in schools (Jonson-Reid; 2010, Brett, 2007). Students in primary schools generally take an inactive role in the action projects, participating most frequently in teacher-chosen projects, rather than being a part of the decision-making process (Ireland, Kerr, Lopez & Nelson, 2006). Considerable benefits have been reported for students when taking an active role in the projects, such as a feeling of empowerment, a sense of pride, greater self-esteem, positive effects on schoolwork and improved mental health (Hannam, 2001; Jerome, 2012). It can be difficult for a class teacher to add active citizenship to an already crowded curriculum and even more challenging to allow the time for students to initiate their own action projects, but if the benefits of doing so outweigh the negatives, teachers may be encouraged to allow space in the curriculum for students to actively seek change in areas they are passionate about. Therefore, there is value in gathering data of teacher and staff perceptions of the merits and difficulties of active citizenship. Schools have the challenge of not just preparing students to survive in a changing world, but to be active, informed and have the ability to seek change for the better (Prior, Mellor & Withers, 2001). Active citizenship can assist students in developing the ability to seek change by showing them that they are capable of initiating and making a difference in their community and beyond. Through authentic and active

learning experiences in citizenship education, students will build knowledge and understanding in order to become active adult citizens (ACARA, 2012). Therefore, it is imperative for Australia's future that students are receiving the opportunity to construct the knowledge, skills and understanding to become effective future citizens.

The significance of this study is that it aimed to provide information on active citizenship opportunities in Australian primary schools, a subject of which there is currently limited literature available. The data will provide educators with some information indicating the positive and negative aspects associated with students having voice in active citizenship, thus indicating whether a small sample of schools have had success in implementing active citizenship with students.

### Research question

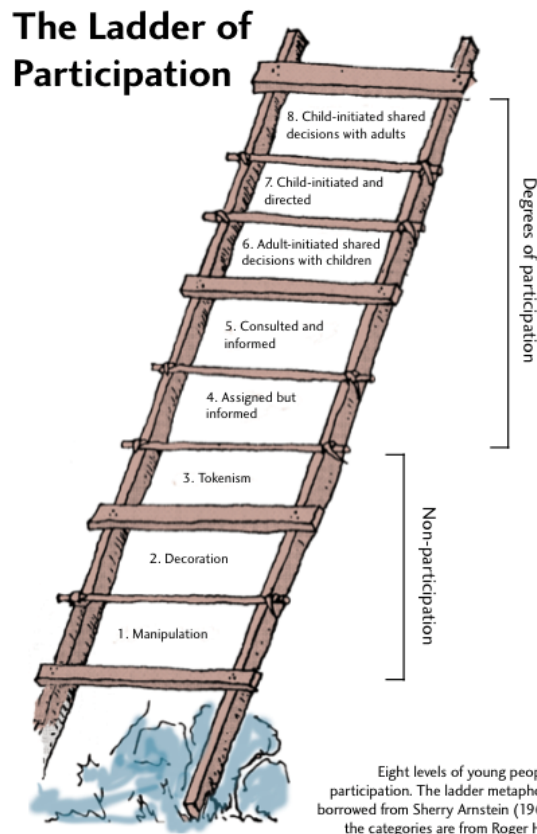
The researcher will be seeking to answer the following question: What do students and staff from two primary schools perceive as the benefits and obstacles associated with student-initiated active citizenship? Although two classes is a small sample, it enabled the researcher to work thoroughly with both classes separately in order to determine the positive and negative aspects of beginning active citizenship in primary school, and to compare the impact in two different learning environments. However, it is acknowledged that the small sample means the findings are not generalisable. Qualitative research aims to delve deeply into individual's lives and gain rich data, to discover "the 'microscopic' details of the social and cultural aspects of individuals' lives" (Agee, 2013, p. 431). By using a small sample in the research, the researcher may be better able to uncover rich individual data. Previous studies into active citizenship in primary schools that used a small sample size (one or two schools) have found that the small size allowed them to gain deep understanding of the way active citizenship was structured in individual schools (Holden, 2000; Flecknoe, 2002). Consistent with this, the research aimed to look deeply into the benefits and challenges associated with student-initiated active citizenship at individual schools by undertaking case studies of two different classes in separate schools.

### Theoretical perspective

There are different levels of participation students can have in active citizenship projects, ranging from non-participatory levels such as students being uninformed about service learning activities, but involved in teacher-chosen projects, all the way to students initiating and carrying out their own plans. This study is framed by Hart's Ladder of Participation, a framework that visually presents the levels at which students can participate in decision-making (see Figure 1) (Hart, 1992). The ladder begins with manipulation, decoration and tokenism, all varying degrees of the child being part of a project, but without being informed or having voice, ranging to the top rungs of the ladder, where students initiate projects and share the decision-making with adults (Hart, 1992). The different degrees of participation represented in the ladder describe the varying levels of involvement that can be occurring in schools. Allowing students to take responsibility for and to share in the decision-making process is most beneficial for them, as it ensures they are empowered, and increases their knowledge, skills and awareness in the community and even the world (Hart, 1992). The ladder of participation examines why and how youth participate, allowing teachers and facilitators to assess a present level of participation, or determine a future level of participation appropriate for students, based on their current motivation and skills. The ladder was created to assist adults in determining a current level of participation, and finding a level of involvement to aim for (Hart, 1992). Hart's ladder of participation informs this research, as it demonstrates the level of students' participation for maximum benefits. The study sought to provide information on the benefits when students' participation levels are in the top rungs of the ladder of participation and the difficulties encountered in achieving, and resulting from, these levels of student engagement.

Figure 1: Hart's ladder of Participation

(1992).



### Limitations of the study

The limitations of this study are that the researcher conducted the interviews, as well as completed the transcriptions and analysis, thus interview analysis could be coloured by selectivity. The research could only be conducted in schools that already included active citizenship in their curriculum, therefore limiting the schools that were able to participate. The small sample size means that findings from the study cannot be generalised.

### Counteracting the limitations

The researcher remained as objective as possible and called on supervisors to check the findings and conclusions regularly. The supervisors checked and critiqued the analysis and transcriptions to ensure the researcher had not drawn selective conclusions. A panel of research experts reviewed the interview schedules to ensure the questions were objective. In the covering letter to principals, the researcher outlined that only schools already participating in active citizenship are eligible to take part in the study. The researcher refrained from generalising the findings obtained from the study.



Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the case for the relevance and importance of the study. The limitations have been discussed; along with the ways the researcher will address the limitations. Because some literature indicates that active citizenship is not occurring to its full extent in Australian schools, it is pertinent to determine whether classes have experienced success in allowing students to initiate and have voice in active citizenship projects in Australian primary schools and to examine the difficulties that have been encountered. The following chapter will present an analysis of the literature available relating to the benefits and difficulties associated with active citizenship around the world and in Australia. It provides the context in which the current study was conducted.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature review

The review of literature in this chapter aims to provide an in depth analysis of the current literature available in Australia and worldwide, an analysis of some studies conducted on active citizenship in schools around the world, and a snapshot of the limited research available into active citizenship in Australian primary schools. This review is used to demonstrate a gap in literature and establish the need for further Australian research into active citizenship, and hence, the relevance of this particular study. Whilst there are Australian studies into active citizenship, very few of these relate to the practice of active citizenship in schools. There are even fewer studies relating to active citizenship at a primary school level in both Australia and worldwide.

#### Background

Although some changes are occurring in the implementation of civics and citizenship education around the world, which encompasses active citizenship, literature indicates that active citizenship opportunities are not being offered to students as regularly, or to the full extent that they could be. Schools play a significant role in preparing students for their futures as active and informed citizens, yet students are not consistently being given active citizenship opportunities (DeJaedhere & Tudball, 2007; Prior et al., 2001). This has been attributed to a range of complications such as lack of space and time in the curriculum and teacher, parent and student attitudes towards active citizenship (Print, 2001; Jonson-Reid, 2010). When active citizenship is implemented in schools effectively, literature and research evidence available indicates that students receive significant benefits such as increased motivation, better school results, and the development of essential skills and qualities necessary to become active and effective citizens (Hannam, 2001; Jerome, 2012; Jonson-Reid, 2010). Literature reveals that the consequences of students taking part in the decision-making processes of active citizenship projects produce even greater benefits.

#### Australian literature and background

The introduction of a standalone civics and citizenship curriculum in Australia indicates that active citizenship opportunities are becoming recognised as a more of a staple part of

students' education. Civics and citizenship education has undergone a dramatic transformation over the past decade, and emerging is a need for student participation and authentic action learning opportunities (Print, 2000). Whilst the importance of students learning to be active and informed citizens for the future has been identified (Print, 2000; Hannam, 2001; Jerome, 2012), students are not frequently being given the opportunity to participate actively in their community, nor do many students or teachers understand the significance of active citizenship (Print, 2000). Some teachers do not feel they have the pedagogical knowledge to teach citizenship education confidently and work alongside organisations for action projects. Other reasons for why active citizenship is not being promoted in classrooms include lack of time and space in the curriculum, lack of funds to initiate projects, and teachers not understanding the content, having not been taught it themselves (DeJaeghere & Tudball, 2007). Although teachers may feel there is a lack of time and space for active citizenship in an already crowded curriculum, it is a topic that can be integrated neatly with history, geography and civics and citizenship (Print, 2001). Not only can active citizenship be integrated in a variety of other subjects, it assists students in learning values, respect, empathy, social justice and sustainability; all essential skills and qualities that can assist their development of morals and their ability to be an independent citizen and learner. Students learning these skills and values can help them to prepare for their futures, teach them how to engage in sensible decision-making, assisting students to be independent and enthusiastic learners (Print, 2001). The great benefit active citizenship has on students in the present and future ensures the importance of successfully integrating action opportunities into the curriculum for Australian students.

#### Australian curriculum and changing attitudes

Civics and citizenship in Australia has progressed from a small part of the state curriculum area of society and environment, to its own standalone curriculum indicating that it is worth giving attention and time to in the classroom. A reason for this upgrade is that the link between citizenship, education and democracy is demonstrated in all recent educational goals for young Australians (ACARA, 2012). Another possible reason could be in order to address the perceived need for young participants in democracy and out in the greater community (Davies & Issit, 2005). In order to assist teachers in gaining the content knowledge to teach citizenship education, Australian civics and citizenship units called 'Discovering Democracy' were created, as well as

other programs. The implementation of these programs demonstrates that attitudes towards students having voice and power in the decision-making processes of active citizenship has slowly begun to change in Australia, with some authorities viewing active citizenship as a more relevant part of the curriculum (DeJaeghere & Tudball, 2007). Although the programs were created with good intentions, many seemed to be unsuccessful. This is evident through the many past and present Australian students that do not yet appear to have adequate civic values and understandings, and do not feel the drive to seek change (Kennedy, 2003). Whilst some improvement has been made in Australian students' civics and citizenship understandings over the past few decades, there is still a way to go before significant difference has been made (Schulz, 2012). Australia's changing attitudes and perceptions towards citizenship education and active citizenship should impact positively for all involved, preparing students meaningfully for a future in which each person has the capability and knowledge to instigate positive change (DeJaeghere & Tudball, 2007). Through active citizenship, students can practise genuine learning experiences that equip them with tools and skills to make a difference in their community and beyond.

#### School community and participation

Many schools include some aspect of participation in civic culture in the curriculum by running a school parliament. Within this parliament, some students are given a chance to take part in decision-making, seek real change and have voice within the school community (Shaw, 2012). Although this is a positive step towards participation, it does not allow all students the opportunity to have voice within their community and to take action. Research has found that when students are empowered to seek change and develop the awareness that they are capable change-seeking citizens, they are more likely to be engaged in school life (Shaw, 2012). The above finding demonstrates that there is significance in seeking ways to allow all students the opportunity to be active and decision-making citizens.

Although much literature indicates that students participating in the decision-making processes of active citizenship has great benefits for those students, this view is not regularly supported in Australian schools. A study conducted in Australia sought to discover the benefits of one particular program developed to encourage active participation in schools, implemented in

low socio-economic schools (Black, Stokes, Turnbull & Levy, 2009). Data were collected using a qualitative approach, through a thorough case study of two low socio-economic schools – a primary school in Tasmania and a high school in Queensland, that were using the ruMAD program, an acronym for Are You Making A Difference (Black et al, 2009). This program is “an 8-step process that guides students from the discovery of shared values to the development and completion of a project that creates real change” (Tasmanian Centre for Global Learning, 2014). The program has the benefit of assisting teachers to adopt a student-centred approach to teaching and allowing students to take charge of their learning in a supportive and structured environment. The data collected indicated that teachers and students both noted improvement in students’ engagement and attitudes as a result of participation in ruMAD (Black et al, 2009). It was also noted that students experienced feelings of a heightened awareness of the world around them, feeling more in touch with their community and the wider world (Black et al, 2009). Many teachers observed that although the program and experience were time consuming, the benefits achieved through participation significantly outweighed the negative aspects (Black et al, 2009). The results from this study indicate that active citizenship opportunities have been beneficial for students in at least one Tasmanian primary school.

### Social capital and education

A number of authors have commented that people with higher socio-economic status are more likely to participate in active citizenship. This has been attributed to a range of reasons including those with higher social capital finding it easier to engage with others and to have influence (Print & Coleman, 2003). In addition, private or religious schools often have an ethos that encourages participation (Browne, Lipsig-Mumme & Zajdow, 2003). Regardless of the reason, it is important to encourage participation from students of every background to ensure that the future is one filled with capable and active citizens. Education can be viewed as a way to gain social capital (Print & Coleman, 2003). Including civics and citizenship opportunities for students of all backgrounds can assist the development of important future life skills for all students and assist them in gaining social capital, thus supporting a positive change in social structure (Print & Coleman, 2003). Through effective citizenship education in all schools and regardless of socio-economic status, it can be presumed that more young people will develop the skills, connections and knowledge to become active, capable and change-seeking citizens.

### Goals of schooling

A goal of Australian schooling is to prepare young people to actively participate in democratic society and to become active and informed citizens. Research conducted throughout the country to determine whether Australian schools were achieving this goal determined that whilst there has been some improvement over the years, Australia is still far from achieving the goal of preparing youth for participation in the future (Shulz, 2012). Undertaking a qualitative approach to data collection, with a multiple choice quiz about civic knowledge given to Australian high school graduates, results showed that students graduating from Australian schools did not yet have the civic knowledge required to be active participants in society (Shulz, 2012). This finding is consistent with the views discussed from the literature above, that although more citizenship education is occurring in Australian schools, it is not occurring to its full extent. Shultz (2012) called for additional collections of data regarding students' engagement in active citizenship opportunities to further add to the information on whether Australian schools are achieving the goal of educating students to become active and informed citizens. This study will add to the information on whether some Australian schools are achieving this goal by highlighting the approach to and frequency of active citizenship opportunities in two Australian schools.

### Long-term impacts

The link between early active citizenship education and becoming a future active citizen was made many years ago. One particular study conducted over the course of 1995-2003 viewed the connection between Australian young people learning about active citizenship whilst school aged and whether they continued to practice those values and skills later in life (Browne, Lipsig-Mumme & Zajdow, 2003). The study undertook a quantitative approach to data collection, through a multiple choice survey given to students early in their schooling then some time after the conclusion of their schooling (Browne, Lipsig-Mumme & Zajdow, 2003). Results from this study indicated that gender plays a part in the willingness of youth continuing to practice active citizenship after formal schooling, being that females were more willing to participate; and that active citizenship education at school leads to more students participating in their community after schooling is completed (Browne, Lipsig-Mumme & Zajdow, 2003). This finding ensures

the relevance of the present research, as it is beneficial to discover whether early active citizenship has immediate benefits when undertaken early in schooling, as well as long-term benefits for participants.

#### International research into active citizenship

Schools play an important part in shaping students for the future, equipping them to be effective, active and informed citizens. Research conducted on the role that schools have in producing 'good' citizens showed that schools play a significant part in preparing students for the future and equipping them with morals, ethics and information (Prior et al., 2001). Prior et al's study conducted in Vanuatu used a mixed methods approach, combining the use of quantitative and qualitative data under a case study method, in order to determine the impact schools have on producing 'good' citizens. The research determined that schools assist students to develop into the adults they will be in the future, and by promoting social tolerance, active citizenship and sound morals, students have greater opportunity to develop into effective, active citizens (Prior et al., 2001). Contrastingly, a great range of educational stakeholders were interviewed, and were of the opinion that schools were not providing adequate values education and active citizenship opportunities, and that teachers were not receiving enough assistance in developing these teaching points (Prior et al., 2001). Schools assist students in developing their future values and morals, and preparing them with skills and knowledge to be active in the community, therefore it is important for all students to have the opportunity to achieve this through their schooling.

An English study uncovered that students experience both educational and emotional benefits from initiating active citizenship projects. Hannam (2001) conducted a study into the impact of active citizenship on secondary school students, discovering that the benefits of student-initiated active citizenship outweighed the negatives significantly. Undertaking a mixed methods approach to data collection with 12 schools, and using a combination of surveys and interviews, data were gathered that indicated some advantages and disadvantages of student-initiated active citizenship. Recorded benefits for students included a sense of independence, empathy, enhanced self-esteem and an enhanced relationship between teachers and students (Hannam, 2001). The author questioned the effect that active citizenship can have on attainment, and examined whether this effect was adverse or positive. It was discovered that 11 schools

recorded no adverse effects, and one school was unsure and unable to answer (Hannam, 2001). This result indicates that, in England, active citizenship has had a positive effect on students' school results, and no adverse effects were recorded. From the 11 schools, 9 schools responded that they had proof of the positive effect on attainment, claiming that results in the schools have improved considerably since the students had begun active citizenship opportunities (Hannam, 2001). Outcomes as positive as improved academic results and mental health is a desired outcome for all Australian students. This study will be partially reproducing Hannam's research, in order to discover whether these results are replicable on a smaller scale at a primary school level. This is due to Hannam's research instruments already being tried and tested and the aims of his research being similar to the aims of the present study.

Engaging students in active citizenship opportunities can have significant benefits for the students' learning. A mixed methods case study of one school in the United Kingdom indicated that students experienced significant learning related benefits from active citizenship, such as increased motivation and better grades (Flecknoe, 2002). Students, teachers, assistants and principals were interviewed, asking to give their perspectives of the benefits active citizenship was producing in their school. Teachers and assistants both indicated that they had noticed a positive change in the students attitudes since taking part in active citizenship, claiming there were many positive benefits from the students' projects, such as increased respect between teachers and students, and support staff and students (Flecknoe, 2002). The present study will also seek teacher and staff perspectives on the benefits and relevance of active citizenship which could add to the current active citizenship literature by highlighting school staff's perceptions of the importance of civic participation and its place in the curriculum.

### Chapter summary

Within this chapter, the importance of active citizenship in schools has been identified in literature, but also identified is an issue of the lack of active citizenship occurring, and the absence of students having ownership over their action projects in schools (Jonson-Reid, 2010; Prior et al., 2001; Print, 2001). The current study sought to uncover not only the perceived benefits for some Australian students in undertaking a decision-making role in active citizenship, but teacher and staff perceptions of the benefits, pitfalls, importance and relevance associated



with student-initiated active citizenship at a primary school level. The literature indicates that there are many benefits associated with students having voice in action projects (Hannam, 2001; Jerome, 2012), but it has also indicated that this is not occurring regularly for various reasons.

The research will add to the current literature on Australian active citizenship, highlighting some benefits and difficulties associated with upper primary school aged students initiating their own active citizenship projects. The current study also emphasises teachers' and school staff's perceptions regarding the relevance and importance of active citizenship in the curriculum. In the following chapter, the methods employed to carry out the current study will be discussed and justified.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Method

The previous chapter reviewed the limited selection of literature and highlighted the studies available relating to active citizenship in Australian primary schools. Schulz, in his 2012 study into the effectiveness of citizenship education called for the collection of further data relating to students' engagement in active citizenship opportunities around the country. This study responds to that call. As research in other countries has highlighted the benefits that students can experience by undertaking authentic learning opportunities and a decision-making role in active citizenship, this study sought to provide insight into the way in which two particular Australian schools approach active citizenship at an upper primary level and what they perceived as the most significant benefits and obstacles. This chapter outlines how the researcher conducted the study, including obtaining ethics approval, methodology, data collection and analysis, the instruments used to collect data and the participants involved.

#### Research design

The nature of the research question directed the research design towards a model that encourages discovering participants' lived experience of particular events, and hence, lent itself towards a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology seeks to capture lived experience, emotions and individual's perceptions of certain events and occurrences (O'Leary, 2010). Phenomenology focuses on individuals' thoughts, feelings and experiences rather than on why something has occurred. Because the question underlying the study concerns student and staff perceptions of a particular phenomenon, face-to-face interviews in which the researcher could witness evidence of the participants' feelings and actions from a firsthand position were deemed suitable. Interviews are a personal approach for those interested in lived experience, allowing the researcher to develop a bond and rapport with participants, thus allowing participants to speak freely (Seidman, 2006). In order to gain rich individual data and a clear picture of a participant's experience with a particular phenomenon whilst still gathering data that will answer the research question, the interviews were semi-structured. Academic research conducted in the field of active citizenship has shown that using semi structured interviews gains the answer to the research question, whilst also acquiring rich, individual, qualitative data (Davies & Evans, 2002). Asking

some set questions, but allowing the interview to develop into a conversation allowed the researcher to gain the answers to the questions required whilst still obtaining individual data and a deep insight into the participants' lived experience with active citizenship. The participants were encouraged to provide as much detail as they desired.

### Ethical clearance and consent

As the project required speaking with children under the age of eighteen, a full ethics application was essential. Research involving minors must demonstrate merit and worth, it must be relevant to the children involved, pitched at their level and unlikely to cause harm or distress to any participants (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007). When ethics approval was gained, two independent schools located in the greater Hobart area were contacted via email, asking the principals whether they agreed for their schools to participate in the study. If one or both of these schools declined, other schools would have been contacted. Once a principal agreed to allow his or her school to participate, the researcher asked for the contact details of teachers in Year 5 or 6, and contacted them directly through email asking if they, their classes, and any staff or volunteers working alongside them wished to participate in the research. The criteria for classes participating were that the students were in Year 5 or 6, the staff have assisted or observed the students' participation in active citizenship projects and that the classes had been involved in at least one student-initiated active citizenship project in the past year.

### Methodology

This phenomenological research undertook a qualitative approach to data collection. Qualitative data were deemed appropriate due to the need to seek participants' lived experiences of active citizenship. Undertaking a qualitative interview method with open-ended questions allowed participants to reconstruct their experiences and to speak freely about the nature of the phenomena (Seidman, 2006). The two separate interviews comprised entirely of open ended questions, but were flexible so that a conversation could develop in order for participants to contribute as much description and detail as they desired, thus giving the researcher insight into the feelings and effects that active citizenship had on each participant. When the data were collected, the researcher explored commonalities relating to the same phenomena, for example,

comparing all students' data relating to their thoughts of the effect that active citizenship had on their schoolwork.

### The Participants

The sample size was small, that being two classes and the staff associated with those classes in two separate schools. The criteria for the choices of schools and classes to participate were that the participants were students in Years 5 or 6, teaching Years 5 or 6, or working or volunteering with those students. The schools must already have been undertaking student-initiated active citizenship, so that it is not introduced to the students by the researcher. These criteria were a minor limitation of the study, as it caused some difficulty to find schools that were already participating, and meant that the data could not be generalised due to the small sample size. The researcher found schools already involved in student-initiated active citizenship by first contacting schools that are known, through spoken word, to take part in active citizenship. When turned down by some schools, the researcher contacted independent Hobart schools at random asking if they were involved in active citizenship learning. The criteria for participation in the study are reflected in the email script that was sent to principals (see Appendix A).

There were 22 participants altogether amongst the two schools, two adults and 20 students. School one was a single sex, female only Catholic school, there was one teacher participant and 15 female student participants spread into three focus groups. School two was a Catholic co-educational primary school. Within School two, there was one teacher participant and five student participants, spread into two focus groups. There were three female and two male participants amongst these two focus groups. Both classes from both schools were Year 6 classes, all students were aged 11 or 12 years.

### Assessment Instruments

There were two interview schedules, an adult interview and a student interview. The interview schedules (see Appendices C and D) were both adapted from existing instruments. The student interview was adapted from Hannam's quantitative questionnaire about students' perceptions of the benefits of active citizenship (Hannam, 2001), and the adult interview adapted from Alam's qualitative notions of active citizenship interview schedule (Alam, 2001). These

instruments were chosen because they have already been successfully implemented in a research situation, which had similar aims in terms of data collection. Using an adapted interview from Hannam's (2001) research also meant that findings from both studies could be easily compared. In order to keep the interview schedules as free from selectivity as possible, a panel of three research experts had reviewed the questions. The panel of research experts fed back to the researcher noting any selectivity, unsuitable language and any changes that could be made to assist gaining an answer to the research question. The questions were then edited following the feedback, and then rechecked by the researcher's supervisory team, and found to be satisfactory.

In the under 30-minute semi formal focus group interviews, students were asked about the active citizenship projects in which they have recently participated, and their perceptions of the benefits and shortcomings of being involved in the project. Students were asked to share their views on the value of active citizenship projects in primary schools. The students had the opportunity to share their experiences with active citizenship projects, whether they felt there were benefits for themselves and others, and whether the projects had any effect on attainment. The adult semi-structured interviews prompted participants to talk about their personal experiences of the students' active citizenship project, their perceptions of the benefits and shortcomings of the projects, and their views on the value and relevance of active citizenship projects in primary schools. Adult participants were asked to discuss their role in the process of student-initiated active citizenship and determine whether they perceived the action project to be beneficial to the students.

### Procedures

Adult participants were interviewed individually, and students were interviewed in small focus groups of 4-6 students. This choice of individual adult interviews and focus group student interviews was based on views and successful implementation expressed in a previous qualitative active citizenship study that demonstrated the gain of rich individual data through using this approach (Davies & Evans, 2002). Teachers who had agreed to allow their class to participate were given the information sheets for parents, students and adult participants (see Appendix B) and the consent forms (see Appendix E) and the researcher arranged a time to meet with the class. Following this, the interview times were organised, at the classroom teachers'

convenience. On the interview day, the researcher arrived at the classroom and organised a quiet place, in the teacher's view, to conduct interviews. The teacher grouped the students in focus groups of 2 to 6 individuals, and then the interviews were conducted. Before the interview, student participants were asked if they understood the interview process and whether they had any questions, which the researcher answered before they began. This was in order to ensure the participants were comfortable with the process, thus ensuring they felt safe enough to contribute descriptions and details of their experience (Seidman, 2006). The interviews were audio-recorded; upon gaining the participants' permission, in order to properly transcribe the interviews at a later date. The participants were asked to give as much information as they would like in answer to the open ended questions so the researcher could gain a deep understanding of their individual experiences with active citizenship. At the conclusion of the interview, the student participants were asked if they would like to see a copy of the transcripts when they were completed and were told that their teachers would also be offered the opportunity to see their transcripts, pending the students' permission. If they wanted to see the transcripts on completion, they were able to suggest changes, which would then have been revised by the researcher. The student participants were reminded that they could contact the researcher if they had any further questions or concerns about the process.

Teacher and other adult participant interviews were scheduled at times that were convenient for the participant. The interviews were individual, and were also audio-recorded, following gaining the participant's permission. The study was introduced and participants were offered the opportunity to ask any questions they may have. Teacher and adult participants were also asked to provide as much detail as they wished in order for the researcher to deeply understand their lived experience of the students' active citizenship activities. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were asked whether they would like to check the transcripts after they had been completed. Class teachers were also offered the opportunity to see their students' transcripts. Adult participants were reminded that if they had any questions or concerns they were welcome to contact the researcher any time, and were told that they would receive a link to the completed thesis when it is made available.

### Data analysis

The data analysis was based on Hannam's data analysis (2001), looking for patterns and reoccurring themes in the transcriptions, such as enhancement of self-esteem, improvement in attainment, and decline in attainment (Hannam, 2001). These themes were then coded using a word or small phrase to describe the set, looking for patterns emerging from the data. A combination of in vivo and descriptive coding was used, this being that the coding was a combination of using a word to describe reoccurring themes, or using a word or phrase that has come to light in the data. A concept map was used to map themes and view connections. Using the concept map, it was easier to see which phrases and themes led to one another, how the themes flow, and easier to discover relationships between the themes. After mapping the themes, and discovering relationships, these were compared and related to current literature, as well as compared with Hannam's results. Further analysis determined how and why these findings are relevant, and whether the benefits Hannam discovered were replicable at a primary school level.

### Chapter summary

This chapter has detailed the conduct of the study, and provided justification for the methods employed. The participants have been discussed, along with the procedures for how the interviews were conducted. The instruments used for data collection have been discussed and justified, and a description of how data analysis was conducted was also provided. The following chapter will present the results obtained along with a brief analysis of those results.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

The purpose of this study was to explore both positive and negative aspects associated with student-initiated active citizenship in the primary school classroom from the perspectives of both students and school staff. This chapter details the data collected from participants. School one will be presented first, with the three focus group interviews and the one adult interview. School two will then be presented, showing the two focus group interviews and the one adult interview. Following this, the findings in relation to themes will be presented. Interview transcripts will be made available by request to the researcher.

#### **i. School One**

See participants section in chapter three for details about this school (Page 18).

#### Focus Group A

This group consisted of four female participants, aged 11 and 12. The students were eager to share their insight into active citizenship, having recently completed a project of raising money and awareness for, and spending time with asylum seekers. The students were asked what they thought of when they heard the words 'active citizenship', to which they responded with a variety of words including helping, community, volunteering and friendships. Upon being asked about their role in their most recent active citizenship project, the students shared that they, under teacher supervision, had organised committees to break down the roles in orchestrating a large project to assist asylum seekers. Within the project they raised money through a variety of means and had various gatherings to meet with and befriend the asylum seeker children. After being asked about the effects of active citizenship on their schoolwork, one student identified that the teacher had created a special weekly session for them in which they could do all their organising and not miss out on classwork. The students identified that they felt that their parents were proud of them for participating in active citizenship opportunities. The students reported that completing this project made them feel happy, proud of themselves and that it had changed their thinking and the way they look at life, specifying that they were able to see things from other viewpoints. When discussing their feelings about their action project, one student spoke of how



scared the asylum seeker children were in the detention centres, demonstrating a deepened knowledge of situations of asylum seekers and the ability to see life from a different perspective. The difficulty they associated with active citizenship was the organisation side of the project, which they stated they had overcome by learning to cooperate with one another.

This particular focus group was animated and eager to discuss their experiences with active citizenship. It appeared they had participated in a variety of active citizenship and service learning opportunities, and that they were proud of their efforts. They students were particularly pleased with their organisational roles in the process and were eager to explain how the ideas and organisation of the project was theirs. It seemed that the students were feeling empowered for making a difference and felt a joint ownership over the project. Although participants had all noted a great change in themselves, their responses were mostly intrinsic, focusing on what they received from the project, rather than the difference they made. They appeared to associate the words 'active citizenship' with their own personal experiences with action projects. This was evident as the participants associated active citizenship with helping, community, volunteering and friendship, all integral aspects of their asylum seeker action project. Some members of this focus group demonstrated that their understanding of asylum seekers and migration had deepened through their comments about how the asylum seeker children were feeling about being placed in detention centres.

#### Focus Group B

There were five females in this group, all aged 12. These participants had taken part in the same asylum seeker project as focus group A, as they were from the same class group. When asked what they associated with the words 'active citizenship' the students responded with a variety of phrases and words including helping out in the community, sport, being an active helper, playing your part in community and not being a wallflower. In response to being questioned about their role in their action project, the students reiterated the previous group's comments about the committees they had created, and told the researcher about the different parts of the project that they had personally completed. They stated that every member of the class had a role in the process. In discussing the effects of active citizenship on their schoolwork, two students stated that active citizenship projects made them happier than they usually were,

thus making schoolwork easier to complete. The students also mentioned that they felt their parents were proud of their efforts because they were helping people in need. Comments about the most meaningful parts of the project included being involved in the community, having a say and inspiring others to also seek change. All students agreed that the projects had changed their thinking, inspiring them to see that it is okay to be different and that they can make a difference. All participants in this group demonstrated their deepened understanding of asylum seekers with comments such as they just want to start a new life, wanting to show them that Australians are not scary and the realisation of how scary it is for the refugees to come here. In discussing the difficulties associated with active citizenship, one student stated that it was challenging listening to others' opinions and thoughts, whilst another specified that putting the project together was the biggest difficulty. All agreed that the teacher was useful as a facilitator in these situations.

The members of this group were very talkative and all had lots of information to share. They were most enthusiastic discussing the parts of the project that were most meaningful to them, the change in thinking they experienced as a part of seeing how others live and realising that they have the capabilities to seek change. It appeared that the students were all in agreement with one another, as they all supported one another's statements with nods or comments. This group provided a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic responses throughout the interview, demonstrating that they did experience a change in the ability to see life from other perspectives. As with the previous focus group, this group appeared to associate active citizenship with their particular experiences as they named helping in the community, sport, being an active helper and playing one's part in the community and projects as being the things they associated with the words. The group members had noted a major positive change in their way of thinking and viewing the world as a significant benefit from their action projects.

#### Focus group C:

In this group of six female students, there were five 12 year olds and one 11 year old. The students talked about their involvement in the projects to help asylum seekers mentioned in the above results as they were from the same class. When asked what they thought of after hearing the words 'active citizenship' there were many responses including asylum seekers, making a difference, the recycle symbol, helping everyone to get a fair life, making the country safe and a

good place, helping as many people as possible, making the community and environment healthy, and organisations. The students spoke of the 'wear yellow' day they had had and a barbeque to raise money, and their roles in organising the events. In discussing whether there was any effect from active citizenship projects on their schoolwork, some of the students responded that it affected schoolwork positively because they have new knowledge about what others have been through, and it gives their schoolwork purpose. One student stated, and all agreed, that parents and teachers were proud of their efforts in seeking change. The students specified that they felt proud of themselves for what they had achieved so selflessly. In talking about whether their active citizenship projects had changed their thinking, students responded that they were experiencing less 'first world problems' and accepting responsibility for their own actions. One student responded that she was finding it easier to think about situations and problems from other perspectives. Participants spoke of the asylum seekers they had met, explaining the sadness and fear many of them felt being in a new country where they did not feel welcome and often without their families. This demonstrated that the students had deepened their knowledge of asylum seekers and immigration through the action process. The students mentioned the following as the difficulties they associated with active citizenship: Trying to all have voice and be heard within such a large group, and the organisation of the project. Participants stated that they had enjoyed doing these projects and felt good that they had made a difference in the community and in individual people's lives. When asked if there was anything else they would like to say, one student stated that the project was fun and she was proud that she could help asylum seekers to start their new life in a more positive way, other students joined in nodding and affirming her comment.

The group were enthusiastic; they all had much to contribute to the interview discussion and all seemed to be in agreement with one another, as no contrasting views were expressed. They spoke eagerly about the change in thinking they had experienced and said they were proud of themselves for seeing life from another perspective and thinking less about their own desires. This group demonstrated a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic responses, showing that they had thought about their own personal gains as well as the difference they had made. There was an interesting mix of responses to the question asking what they associated with the words 'active citizenship'. Some participants in this group, just as with the other groups, seemed to relate the words to their own experience with responses such as asylum seekers, making a

difference, helping everyone to get a fair life, making the country safe and making the country a good place. Other participants had related the words to some marketing aspects of active citizenship such as the recycle symbol and organisations. It appeared that the participants in this group had enjoyed the experience of active citizenship and the changes to themselves they believed it had caused.

Teacher one:

Teacher one had had some experience with active citizenship in primary school throughout the years and was enthusiastic to discuss its validity and importance in the curriculum. One comment that the participant mentioned was the Catholic ethos of the school and how it fuelled the belief in service for others. She mentioned that this particular philosophy encouraged going out into the community to make a difference. She discussed that every year the students carried out a small community project of their choosing, but this year the students had come to her asking to do more, and so the project had grown significantly through the students' initiation. She discussed many positive aspects, as well as some difficulties from student-initiated active citizenship, but stated that it is worthwhile and the authentic learning and decision-making teaches the students so much about life, community and life skills.

This participant was a Year 6 teacher who had been teaching for 17 years. She had been the facilitator in the asylum seeker action projects described by the focus groups above. She discussed the committees that the students, in cooperation with her, had created to make a school parliament and divide the organisational tasks. The participant shared how the students had become engrossed in their migration unit early in the year and had decided independently that they had wanted to do something 'real' to make a difference for struggling migrants. She explained that the Catholic ethos of the school was based on service for others, so school staff were eager to encourage students to engage in active citizenship opportunities. When asked what she believed to be the purpose of active citizenship in upper primary grades, the participant stated that her belief was that the purpose is to instill in the students an awareness of the need to reach out in and engage with the community, and to give students an opportunity to participate in active citizenship. She believed the most positive aspects of the active citizenship projects to be the students' enthusiasm, their increased confidence and the development of their organisational

and communication skills. The difficulties she had noted were when some students had negative attitudes toward the chosen cause. She had not wanted to persuade their thinking, but had sought to broaden and extend their thinking. Difficulties also noted were the time demands and organisational aspects of the projects. In being asked whether she had perceived any effect on the school community from the Year 6 students participating in active citizenship she spoke about how their participation had created an awareness with the whole school and how these projects foster school spirit. She also discussed the positive feedback received from the wider community in the form of newspaper articles and online videos released about the students' project. The teacher felt that it was really worthwhile in a society where children are quite privileged for students to see what life is like for those less fortunate and to learn skills to make a difference and seek a better world through active citizenship. When asked if she had anything else she wanted to share, the participant spoke about attending a professional development session in which she learned that the most valuable way to benefit one's health is to do something good for someone else. She stated that she had found this to be true and important, and she believed the experience of helping others had positively impacted on the students.

**ii. School two**

See participants section in chapter three for details about this school (Page 18).

Focus group D:

This group comprised of two female students aged 12 and 11. When asked what they associated with the words 'active citizenship', the responses were raising money, helping people with their problems and fundraising. The participants discussed a project they had completed raising money and awareness working alongside an organisation that helped provide homeless people with sleeping equipment. A classmate had brought the issue of homelessness to the class group, after seeing a television advertisement for the previously mentioned organisation. The issue had caught the interest of the majority of the class who were eager to participate. Through a series of projects including a cake bake, a swim-a-thon, and an Internet awareness page, the students had raised over \$2,000 for the charity. The participants mentioned no adverse effects on their schoolwork, but no positive effects either. Both students spoke of involving their parents in the project and how they believed their parents were happy about what they were doing. Both

participants felt that the project had changed their thinking, saying that they are now better able to consider others, think outside their own world and be appreciative of what they had. Although both participants spoke of a change in thinking, they only spoke briefly of their deepened knowledge from the project saying they were now aware of how lucky they are to have a roof over their heads and food daily. They agreed that the most challenging aspect was getting the message out to others in order to raise the money and awareness. One participant stated that active citizenship had been a great experience for her, and she felt amazed in a positive way at the difference that had been made. The other participant spoke of the founder of the organisation they had raised money for coming to the school to meet with the students and give the class an award. She noted this recognition as a meaningful aspect of the experience.

This focus group consisted of two students who had taken interest to, and in turn taken part in a project initiated by another student. A mixture of intrinsic and extrinsic responses were noted, demonstrating that this group had considered the benefits from both their personal perspectives and the perspectives of those they had helped. It appeared that these students related 'active citizenship' to their own personal experience, as they had chosen fundraising, raising money and helping the needy as the words they related to active citizenship. These participants were less confident than previous groups answering some of the questions, appearing to be new to the experience of active citizenship. Nevertheless, they were confident when expressing their views about the changes and benefits they had experienced.

#### Focus group E:

This group consisted of two males and one female participant, all aged eleven. The female in this group was the one who had brought the idea of helping the homeless to her class group. When asked what they thought of on hearing the words 'active citizenship', the responses were citizens, helping out people and the needy. The group talked about the projects they had completed, and their roles in the process. The female student had more to contribute and spoke about the cake sale and initiating the idea. One male student spoke of the swim-a-thon and how it had been advertised on the radio. The other male student said that projects could affect schoolwork negatively, as they missed out on a bit of school time, but they all agreed that they felt their parents were proud of their efforts and not concerned about them missing some

schoolwork. All agreed that active citizenship had changed their thinking as it made them consider others rather than just themselves. They believed it had allowed them to see how other people live and made them feel lucky for what they had. One male student found that a difficulty of the process was adding up the money. No other difficulties were discussed. The female student specified that one of the most meaningful parts of the process was having the founder of the organisation meet with them and present them with an award. A male participant said that completing this project helped him to see how lucky he was to have food, education and shelter, demonstrating a deepened knowledge obtained through the project.

The male students in this group were noticeably less enthusiastic to share their experience than their female classmate, with one more reluctant than the other. This group were hesitant answering some questions. The students appeared to be proud that they had made a difference and pleased with the changes in themselves that they had experienced. The responses from this group were primarily intrinsic, demonstrating that they had not deeply considered the difference they had made, but were more focused on the benefits they had received. This group appeared to also relate active citizenship to their own experience, as they related it with helping out people and the needy. The more reluctant male said the word 'citizens' in a tone that sounded like a question when asking what he related to the words 'active citizenship'. He did not contribute much to the interview, just the word 'citizens' and saying that the project caused him to miss out on some schoolwork.

Teacher two:

This individual participant was the assistant principal and a classroom teacher at School two. She had been teaching for eight years. She discussed the project that her students had approached her about and how they had started raising money and awareness for homeless people working alongside an organisation. She noted that the students had done all the organising and had contacted the coordinator of the charity to work in partnership and see where their assistance was most needed. She mentioned that her role in the process was one of facilitator, just overseeing organisation and stepping in to assist when required. When asked what she thought the purpose of active citizenship in primary school was, the participant stated that the purpose was to make a connection with the community and show the children that they are

capable of making a difference. She noted the most positive aspects of the students' active citizenship project being the students' initiative and involvement, and contributing their own ideas. She spoke of how this experience helped them to develop their own ways of resolving conflict and being proactive. She said she had not come across any negative aspects, but the projects could be time consuming. She believed that all students benefit from participating in active citizenship, particularly when they are contributing their own ideas and taking an active role in the process. The teacher felt that the older primary students' involvement in this project had positively affected the school community as their actions served as influence for the younger students, and sent a positive message to the rest of the school. In her eight years of teaching, this project was the only dealing that this teacher had had with active citizenship.

Although this was her first experience with active citizenship, the teacher felt that there were significant benefits for students and the school community, and that participation was really worthwhile even though it is time consuming. She perceived that the most significant benefits from taking part in active citizenship to be the life skills that students develop and making a connection with the community.

### iii. **Findings in relation to themes**

This section will discuss the findings in relation to the themes that have come to light through the data. Within this section, the roles of students and the roles of teachers will be discussed, and the perceived effects on attainment and the school community will be addressed. These will be related to relevant literature in chapter five.

#### Informed involvement in active citizenship

It was difficult to find schools to participate in this research, as many schools declined on the basis that they were not practicing active citizenship at a primary school level. Upon securing two schools, coincidentally both schools were of a Catholic ethos; therefore teachers mentioned that service was a part of their religious values. Regardless of the Catholic ethos, one of the two teachers interviewed stated that this was her only dealing with active citizenship. Although the teachers interviewed mentioned that their action projects had great benefits for the students, a possible reason to indicate why active citizenship may not be occurring so often in schools was



that it is time consuming. Teachers said little about why active citizenship was not occurring frequently, but both acknowledged the great benefits that can come from making the time in the curriculum to include these opportunities. One of the teachers said, “If you can find the time, it’s worth it” (Teacher two), whilst the other noted, “They [active citizenship opportunities] are really worthwhile, it’s getting students to think outside their privileged worlds” (Teacher one).

Throughout the process, students gained a deepened knowledge of the cause they were supporting by working alongside charities and organisations to find the ways they could best assist. The students in school one worked alongside the asylum seeker children, meeting and playing with them and deepening their knowledge of migration and the asylum seekers’ knowledge of Australian life through one on one interaction. Some comments given by students demonstrating a deepened knowledge of the cause included “It made me sad that they don’t have the career opportunities that we have with our education and it’s not fair” (12 year old girl) and “We realised how scary it is for refugees to come here” (12 year old girl). One student spoke about a boy she had met at one of the organised gatherings and what she had learned from him:

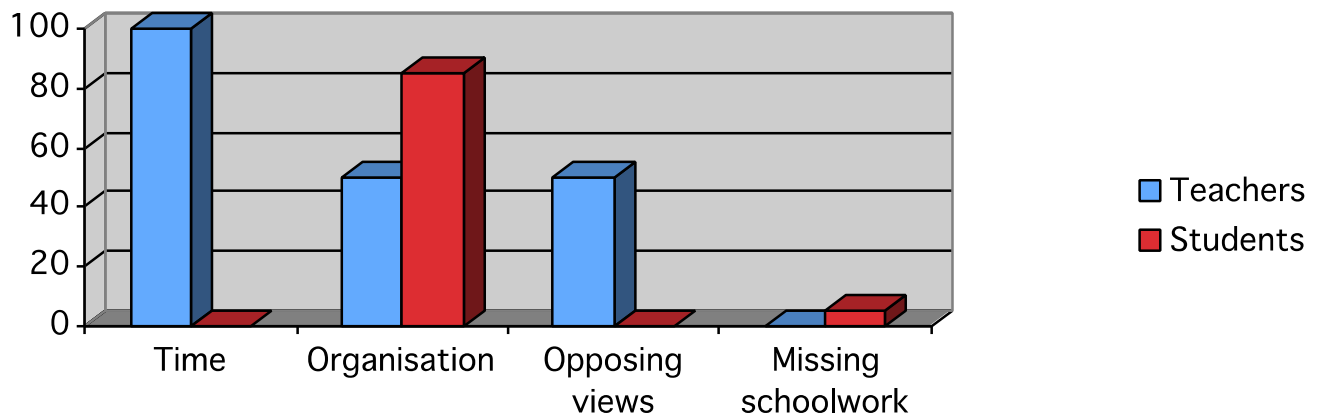
“We met a boy at the barbeque who was really sad about leaving his family behind. They have to be so mature to come here. Boys that age here have parties and what not, but boys from there just have to grow up. They don’t get let out into the community until they’re 18, it’s like being in jail for six years” (12 year old girl).

The students in school two had less to say demonstrating their deepened knowledge, but many spoke of a change in thinking upon realising how little some people had in comparison to them. Some comments about this included: “It’s made me think more about other people, and that we have more than them and we are very lucky” (11 year old girl) and “It sort of made us realise a bit more that we are really lucky to have a school to go to, an education and have food on the table every night” (11 year old boy). Most participants had perceived a change in the way they view the world through their project, demonstrating a deepened knowledge gained from their participation.

### Student roles in active citizenship

When asked to identify their role in the process of the active citizenship projects, 100% of student participants, 20 students, stated that they had a significant role; such as they had initiated the project, contributed major ideas and/or had an organisational role. There was contrast in responses to how they felt about having these major roles in the process, most frequently the same students would be proud of their efforts but also viewed the logistical and planning challenges as the central difficulty. In being asked about the most challenging aspects of their action projects, 85% of student participants listed, or agreed with the students listing, organisational aspects as a substantial challenge. Comments relating to the challenges included, “The most challenging part was putting the whole project together” (12 year old girl), “It was really difficult to organise because there were lots of forms and things to be able to visit the detention centre” (12 year old girl) and “Organising the barbeque was hard” (11 year old girl). These comments are in relation to some of the different action projects the students in school one had initiated to help and raise awareness for asylum seekers.

Figure 2: Perceptions of difficulties



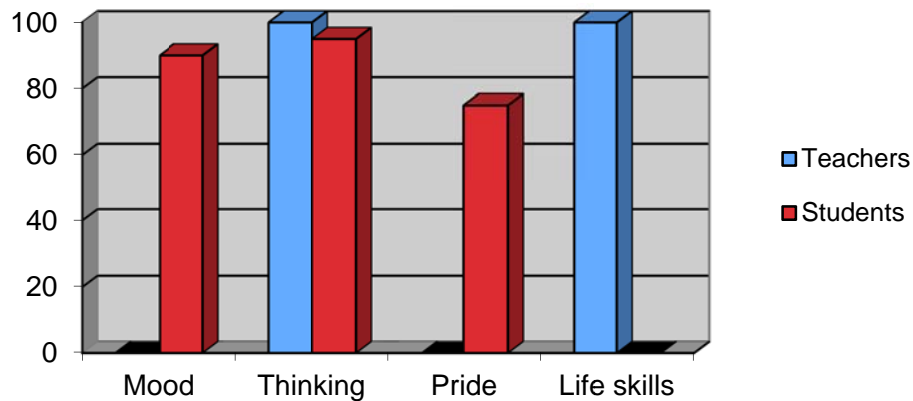
The overwhelming view from all participants was that students having an active role in the process ensured great benefits for learning and individuals. Teachers reported students developing essential life skills through the process, learning to work co-operatively with one another and become more aware of others' needs. In being asked if there are benefits for all students involved, one teacher said, “Yes, I think so, putting themselves in the shoes of other

people, mainly disadvantaged, and thinking about people less fortunate than themselves” (Teacher two). The other teacher participant mentioned the life skills that students learn throughout the action process:

“They learn the skills of organising events, how to fundraise, how to create an awareness in their own school and in the broader community. They learn how to communicate in formal settings, how to debate and discuss important issues. They learn to be an active citizen and how they can have their say and have voice” (Teacher one).

Student participants reported great benefits for themselves in having such an active role in the process, including enhanced mood, pride in self and a change in their way of thinking. Most student participants reported positive changes in their moods due to completing their action projects, 90% of students stated that they felt happier for having made a difference. Some comments made about the effect on moods from student participants included “I feel happier”, (12 year old girl), “I get a happy feeling when I help people” (11 year old girl) and “I think schoolwork is easier because we’re happier” (11 Year old girl). Of the 20 student participants, 75% reported feeling proud of themselves for their efforts, saying things such as “I’m proud that I helped someone” (11 year old girl), and “It made me feel proud that I had helped out in the community” (12 year old girl). All student participants felt that their thinking had been changed in a positive way through the process of active citizenship. Students noted changes such as “We’ve each grown as a person” (12 year old girl), “You think differently about what our lives are like compared to others” (11 year old girl), and “The way we see people in other parts of the world has changed” (11 year old boy). Collectively, these observations tend to indicate that the students had perceived change and maturity occurring in their thinking and developing knowledge of appreciating other perspectives through completing their action projects.

Figure 3: Perceptions of most significant benefits:



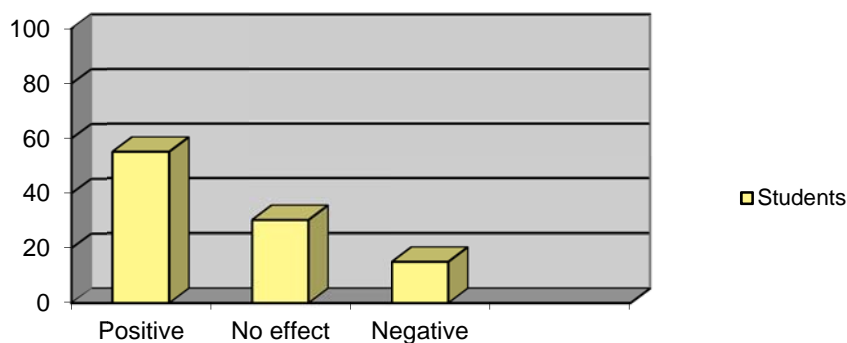
#### Teacher roles in active citizenship

Throughout the active citizenship process in both schools, the teachers identified their role as facilitator, observing the students sharing their ideas, organising and carrying out their plans. They stepped in only to assist where needed and to ensure all students were heard. Student and teacher participants both agreed that this was the most beneficial role for teachers to take as it allowed the students the freedom to make their own decisions, carry out their plans and reap the benefits, whilst still having an adult nearby to intervene if required. When asked about the most meaningful parts of the experience, one student stated: “Usually adults do everything and we don’t get a say but this time we got to have opinions and do what we wanted to help” (12 year old girl). Another student mentioned the co-operative work of teachers and students together as the most meaningful part: “We had ideas and the teacher had ideas, so we joined them all together to make this awesome project” (12 year old girl). The teachers both identified their roles in the process as assisting with the coordination side of the projects, but mostly allowing the students to have their own views and organise the projects independently of adults. In discussing her role in the action project, Teacher two stated: “I suppose I helped coordinate it all and gave the class time in the teaching day to come up with ideas and organise”. In response to the same question, Teacher one specified: “My experience has just been to be facilitator and support the students with their ideas”. Together, these results tend to indicate that the students found their active citizenship experience meaningful when they took charge of their projects and the teachers took a secondary role to observe, support and facilitate.

### Effects on attainment

In discussing the effects that participation can have on students' schoolwork and homework, the majority of student participants reported either positive or no effect on their work. The student participants were asked whether they felt that their participation in active citizenship affected their schoolwork at all and 55% of the 20 students recorded their participation opportunities as having a positive effect on their schoolwork. Students noted that the positive effect on their moods and self worth from completing active citizenship projects made their schoolwork feel easier and more meaningful. Some comments related to this included, "It has a positive effect and makes us try harder because we actually have an education" (11 year old girl) and "I think schoolwork is now easier because we're happier because we're helping people" (12 year old girl). In answering the same question, 30% of student participants perceived that their active citizenship had no effect on their schoolwork, positive or adverse, because time had been scheduled in the teaching day specifically for the students to organise their projects. In one focus group, in response to the question about effects on schoolwork a student specified, "No, we do it every Thursday as a special session" (11 year old girl) and the other members of focus group agreed with her statement. Only 15% of student participants had perceived a negative effect on their schoolwork from participating in active citizenship projects. In response to the question, one student noted, "You miss out on a bit of school and some work" (11 year old boy). The majority of students had perceived that participating in active citizenship either had a positive or no effect on attainment, which is consistent with results from other studies.

Figure 4: Student perceptions of effects on attainment



### Effects on school community

Teacher participants were asked to share their perceptions of the effect that the older students of the primary schools being active in the community can have on the other students at the school. Both teachers noted positive effects on the school community, feeling that the older students were role models for the younger students. They believed their participation in active citizenship had inspired and influenced the younger students. Teacher two felt that the positive message sent to the school community from the older students' active participation was a great benefit to the school as a whole, "As leaders of the school, the younger ones look up to them and are looking at what sort of initiatives they're driving as role models so I think it sends a really positive message through to the rest of the school" (Teacher two). Teacher one commented on the school spirit and community-like feelings that were fostered through the older students' participation, "It helps the school feel like one community as we all do something together, it creates school spirit" (Teacher one). Teacher one also spoke about the positive feedback that had been received due to some media coverage of the students' action project. She noted, "The feedback from the video and article has been very positive and we got lots of comments. I think the community appreciates what we do," (Teacher one).

### Chapter summary

The data revealed that all participants found active citizenship meaningful and beneficial in some way. Many student participants mentioned their way of thinking had changed and them becoming more appreciative of what they had, and less absorbed in their own issues. The majority of student participants mentioned positive or no impacts on schoolwork, but a few discussed difficulties when class time is missed due to active citizenship projects. Over half the participants had felt that their schoolwork felt more meaningful since they had started practicing active citizenship. Most student participants had demonstrated a deepened understanding of the cause they were supporting and were able to relate the people they were helping to their own lives, realising that they were fortunate to be in the position they were in. Most groups contributed a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic responses, demonstrating that they had noted the difference they had made as well as their own personal gains. Some groups contributed only intrinsic responses, showing that they were more concerned about the benefits for themselves

than others. Many noted that the positive aspects of active citizenship included a change in thinking, a sense of pride, developing new skills, and the feeling of making a difference. Negative aspects included difficulty in organising the projects, ensuring that everyone has a chance to articulate their views and ideas, and that active citizenship could be time consuming. All participants, adult and student, believed that their involvement in active citizenship was a meaningful process. The following chapter will discuss the results and relate them to relevant literature and other studies.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

This study gathered and analysed data relating to how students and staff perceive active citizenship in the upper primary classroom. This chapter discusses the results presented in chapter four, and relates them to relevant literature and other research into active citizenship. The results have been compared to Hannam's pilot study (2001) into the effects of active citizenship to determine whether the results from his study were replicable on a smaller scale.

#### Informed participation

In order for students to be taking part in informed participation, rather than gratified community service, students must understand why they are seeking change and the process must bring about mutual learning. For individuals to successfully participate in informed action projects their project must be personally meaningful and they need to gain knowledge throughout the process (Schulz, 2012). The students in the current study demonstrated that their participation was informed through initiating the action projects by bringing the concern they had to their teachers and expressing a desire to do something to help. The students demonstrated that they had deepened their knowledge through their participation in active citizenship, with students from school one speaking of their increased knowledge of migration and students from both schools reporting that they were able to see life from the perspectives of others. Meaningful participation in active citizenship can bring about significant learning for young people, both about themselves and about others (Jerome, 2012). Although students can learn much about themselves through participation, students can also gain knowledge that will assist them educationally and to understand the world around them. In his pilot study, Hannam found that participation in active citizenship assisted students in gaining knowledge and skills that assisted them across the curriculum (Hannam, 2001). The students in the current study did not specify that these new understandings had helped their learning, but they did demonstrate gains in knowledge through participation.



### Involvement in active citizenship in primary school

The finding that not many schools throughout Tasmania are regularly practicing active citizenship relates to views in literature about the lack of active citizenship occurring in schools and the possible reasons why it is not occurring as frequently as it could be. Both teachers in this research noted that active citizenship projects with primary school students can be very time consuming. This is consistent with literature stating that many teachers feel that there is a lack of space and time in the curriculum to fit active citizenship opportunities (Print, 2001; Hannam, 2001). In his pilot study, Hannam recorded that some teachers and tutors were reluctant to allow their students the scope to make decisions and participate freely in active citizenship projects due to time constraints and lack of trust in students' decision-making (Hannam, 2001). This was not discussed with teachers in the current study, but could be a point for future research. Further research could involve interviewing teachers to find their views on the relevance of active citizenship in the primary school classroom and reasons for the lack of implementation currently.

### Student roles in active citizenship

In the previous chapter, all students had reported that they had had a significant role in the process of their active citizenship project. Many students expressed the view that they had perceived a change in themselves through having this responsibility. These findings are consistent with views expressed in much scholarly literature. Of the 20 student participants, 90% mentioned feeling better within themselves and feeling proud of their efforts. In discussing the concepts of service learning and active citizenship in the United States and in England, Jerome suggests that active opportunities “are likely to be personally meaningful to participants and generate emotional consequences, to challenge values as well as ideas” (Jerome, 2012, p. 60). This is evident in the current study as the students talk about how they have grown as individuals and how their views have been questioned and changed. Alam (2011) also discusses the importance of active citizenship opportunities promoting meaningful change for students. In their responses, the students perceived that a change in their views and way of thinking had occurred throughout the projects.

The findings are also consistent with the results found in Hannam's (2001) pilot study of the effects of active citizenship on secondary students. Hannam's findings showed that students,

when asked about the changes that had occurred for them throughout the action projects, had also commented on an increased sense of social and personal efficacy (Hannam, 2001). Whilst social and personal efficacy is a difficult concept to isolate in speech, this is demonstrated by the data in the current study through the sense of pride and happiness the students had noted from completing their action projects. Teachers in Hannam's study had documented that "participative activities were of great benefit to all students regardless of gender, academic ability or social background, and they commented on enhanced self-esteem, improved attendance and engagement with learning" (Hannam, 2001, p. 56). Teachers in the current study had noted the significant benefits to all students involved, particularly commenting on the skills students were learning to prepare them for the future and the changes to students' thinking. Teachers in this research did not comment on improved attendance and engagement with learning, but they had noted a change in students' attitudes, including greater enthusiasm. An interesting point Hannam (2001) discussed in his study was that girls had a tendency to perceive stronger benefits from active citizenship opportunities than boys. Although the sample size in this research is too small to generalise, very few males were willing to participate in the study and those who did participate had considerably less to contribute to the discussions than the females. Male participants were notably more negatively inclined, noting less benefits than females generally did in this instance.

Overall, this study has confirmed several of the key findings from the research literature relating to active citizenship. Although the sample size is too small to generalise, the majority of students in this study and studies around the world have noted great benefits for themselves and changes in their way of viewing the world (Hannam, 2001; Schulz, 2012; Flecknoe, 2002). Through initiating their own active citizenship projects, many students in both this study and Hannam's (2001) study perceived a change in their moods, and feelings of self-worth and pride. Teachers in both studies also perceived a positive change in their students and witnessed the development of important life skills that they attributed to students taking an active role in active citizenship. A possibility for future research may be to find out how many schools, both primary and secondary, around Australia are allowing students to engage in active citizenship, and examine whether the results of this study are replicable in Australia at a considerably larger scale.

### Teacher roles in active citizenship

In both schools interviewed, the teachers identified their roles as being facilitator, allowing students to have voice in their projects and share in the decision-making. According to Hart's ladder of participation described in chapter one and shown in figure 1, shared decision making in cooperation with an adult is the most beneficial level of participation for students. Although children are capable of great thought and actions, they do not usually have the decision-making skills that an adult has developed after many years of life experience. The convention on the rights of a child states that children should have the right to freedom of expression and speech; therefore children should be able to instigate action projects that are meaningful to them and have voice in their meaningful projects (Hart, 1992). The results from this study are consistent with that reference, as students and teachers perceived this level of participation to be highly beneficial for the students involved and benefits were procured through students sharing decision-making with adults.

These results are also consistent with the results in Hannam's (2001) pilot study. In both cases, students perceived great benefits from their authentic active citizenship opportunities, noting that a considerably meaningful part of the opportunity was having voice and authority in the projects. Hannam (2001) described teachers and tutors acting the role of facilitator and supporter. They noted that students shared responsibility for their projects, and positive effects on attainment and self-efficacy were gained (Hannam, 2001). The students in the current study required slightly more teacher support, being primary school aged, but took pride in and stepped up to the responsibility of carrying out the projects themselves.

The results collectively suggest that students benefit considerably and have a more meaningful experience when they have an active role in active citizenship. This depends upon having freedom of voice and shared power in decision-making. Although these results cannot be generalised as they are a small sample, there are some interesting points that would make for a possible future study. For example, further research could be to explore teachers' views in relation to what they feel their role should be in active citizenship.

### Effects on attainment

Students' perceptions about the effect of active citizenship on attainment are consistent with those of Hannam's study (2001). Hannam's data showed that the overwhelming view from all groups of participants was that active citizenship had a positive effect on attainment. Staff and students alike had perceived a change in motivation, self-esteem and students' engagement with learning (Hannam, 2001). This change was also apparent in the current study as a majority of participants reported a change in mood and their sense of self, perceiving their schoolwork easier to manage and more meaningful as they became happier. Although no hard evidence was collected in this study to support the perception of positive effects on attainment, many schools in Hannam's (2001) study were able to produce results evidence showing the positive effects on attainment since students had begun their active citizenship projects. A possibility for future research could be to explore the effects on attainment over time of involvement in active citizenship education.

Together the results imply that many students perceive a positive effect on attainment from the lift in their moods and self esteem. Although these results cannot be generalised, these findings are consistent with Hannam's (2001) conclusions that positive effects occur for students' learning and attainment due to the change in their sense of self through their participation in active citizenship. The findings in both studies indicate that active citizenship can improve students' sense of self-worth, self-esteem, and engagement with learning, which in turn can make their schoolwork feel more manageable and more meaningful to them.

### Effects on school community

As there appears to be very little literature available on the topic of the effects on younger students when older students in a school community undertake action projects, this could be a point for further research. Although some literature suggests that the influence of older people in children's lives, including teachers, can assist students in their drive to participate in the community, there was a lack of studies about the impacts of older peers being role models. Literature suggests that teachers and adult role models have the power to inspire, encourage and support students in becoming active and effective citizens in their community (Holdsworth, 2008). The teachers in the current study had reported the fostering of school spirit and a positive

message sent to the school community when the older students were acting as role models for their younger peers. Whilst literature discusses teachers, parents and the like as role models for younger students, literature relating to the influence of older peers as role models was not found.

#### Australian curriculum and active citizenship

Although previously presented evidence suggests that active citizenship is not frequently being offered to Australian students, the data collected demonstrates the students' achievement of a number of ACARA outcomes. Within the general capabilities, the personal and social capabilities of ACARA suggest that students will develop and apply personal, interpersonal and social skills, and that these can be demonstrated through collaborative work, decision-making and developing communication skills, conflict resolution and leadership skills (ACARA, 2012). The student participants demonstrated the development of this capability through their teamwork throughout their projects, learning to listen to others, resolve conflict and make decisions together, and taking a leadership role within their projects. Another personal and social capability suggests that students will learn to understand themselves and others, and manage relationships, lives, work and learning more effectively – this can be demonstrated through development of empathy, responsible decision-making, working in teams and handling challenging situations constructively (ACARA, 2012). The participants in the current study effectively demonstrated the development of this outcome through exhibiting the ability to view life from other perspectives and working through the difficulties of managing a team project collaboratively and with little teacher input. This demonstrates that informed participation in active citizenship can assist students in developing important outcomes within the Australian curriculum.

The participants also demonstrated the achievement of several age appropriate civics and citizenship outcomes within the curriculum. In Years 5 and 6, students will develop appreciation for different points of view, engage in discussion about community and national issues and develop a broader awareness of global issues such as human rights (ACARA, 2012). Participants showed the achievement of these outcomes through initiating and completing projects that address community and global issues, including engaging in discussions and learning to view issues from other perspectives. Students in Years 5 and 6 will have the opportunity to engage in practical civics and citizenship activities and learn the skills that enable active citizenship

(ACARA, 2012). Participants demonstrated achievement of these outcomes by participating in authentic learning opportunities that allowed them to learn firsthand knowledge about initiating change and about global or community issues, and developing the skills required to become active and change-seeking citizens. These results tend to indicate that participation in active citizenship in primary school achieves Australian curriculum outcomes, therefore is a relevant and important part of learning in Australia.

### Chapter summary

As a whole, the data tend to indicate that students and teachers perceive significant benefits for students in upper primary school when they take an active and informed role in active citizenship opportunities. Although the data set is too small to generalise, the results are consistent with views expressed in literature as well as with data collected in other studies. Most findings from the current study correspond with the results in Hannam's (2001) study of the effects of active citizenship on secondary school students in England. Teachers perceived benefits for students' sense of self-worth and self-esteem, as well as the development of important skills that they will require for their futures as active and informed citizens. Students felt a sense of pride in what they have achieved, as well as a sense of ownership over the project and gains in their self-efficacy. Many students perceived that their schoolwork became easier and more meaningful as their moods improved and their pride grew. Some negative effects were recorded, such as time consumption and the difficulty for the students in organising their own projects, but all participants observed that the main result of completing these projects was positive and meaningful to each individual. Many interesting points were uncovered that could lead to further research opportunities in order to add to the limited literature available regarding active citizenship in Australian primary schools. One particular concern noted before, during and after data collection was that although the benefits of student participation has been uncovered in various studies and literature, students are not frequently being given the opportunity to participate in active citizenship. The results showed that in these particular instances, the perceived positive effects from students participating in active citizenship outweighed the perceived negative effects, which is also consistent with views expressed in literature and other research results. The data also showed that students were achieving ACARA outcomes

throughout the process. The conclusions drawn from the data collected in comparison to views and results from other literature will be presented in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

This phenomenological research was seeking to answer the question: ‘What do staff and students from two primary schools perceive as the benefits and obstacles associated with student-initiated active citizenship projects in primary school?’ through semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that teachers of the two primary schools involved in the study perceived the benefits of active citizenship to be the development of important life skills such as organisation and communication skills. They believed that students having an active role in the process resulted in them becoming more confident and self-reliant. The teachers perceived few obstacles associated with active citizenship, but mentioned that it can be time consuming and that finding the balance between allowing the students freedom of voice and ownership, whilst ensuring all students have a say can be challenging. The majority of students perceived that the most beneficial aspects of their experience was an increase in their happiness and sense of self, a change in their thinking and that their schoolwork felt easier due to increased mood and confidence. The most negative aspect that the students had noted was the difficulty in organising their projects, including relying on others, deciding on ideas and filling out forms. Three students also noted that they found it difficult when they missed out on some schoolwork.

The current study was designed to partially replicate Hannam’s (2001) pilot study into the effects of active citizenship on secondary school students and their schoolwork in order to see whether the results found by Hannam were replicable at a primary school level at a smaller scale. Results found in the current study were consistent with the results from Hannam’s research, with a few subtle differences due to the age differences in the samples. Hannam’s results indicated that the student participants had perceived a positive change in their moods and sense of self, feeling more confident, self assured and proud of their actions (Hannam, 2001). This had a follow on effect of students forming more positive relationships with their teachers, which also ensured increased motivation and efforts in their schoolwork (Hannam, 2001). Although the student participants in the current study were 11 and 12 years of age, and hence likely to be less articulate, they discussed feeling happier in themselves and proud of their actions. They reported feeling that their schoolwork was easier as it felt more meaningful and they felt happier. The



results in Hannam's (2001) study were, therefore, replicable on a smaller scale at a primary school level.

All participants discussed more positive aspects of their experience with active citizenship than negative aspects. Although there were obstacles associated with the implementation of active citizenship at a primary school level, the benefits for the students ensured that it was perceived as a worthwhile experience in which the benefits outweighed the negative aspects. This is consistent with views discussed in literature and results determined in other studies. Although time consuming, active citizenship was regarded as beneficial for all involved, students can develop important life skills and traits, teachers can work alongside happier and more motivated students and witness the growth of those students (Hannam, 2001; Jerome, 2012; Prior et al, 2001, Flecknoe, 2002). This study has demonstrated that active citizenship had benefits for students in two Australian upper primary schools.

Further research would be required to generalise the results and to more accurately determine whether these perceptions of the benefits Australian primary school students can experience through participation in active citizenship are consistent Australia-wide. A larger sample size would provide insight into how many schools throughout Australia are actually providing opportunities for students to participate in the decision-making, as well as how many schools are actually practicing active citizenship at a primary school level. The results throughout the study posed many other questions that would be answerable with a larger sample size, such as effects on attainment, teachers' reasons for providing or not providing participation opportunities, whether the perceived benefits are different for boys and girls, teachers' personal commitments to social change and effects on the school community when older primary school students participate in active citizenship.

Australian schools have the responsibility to prepare students for an uncertain and diverse future in which they can be effective and active citizens. The results from the current study correlate with results from many other studies around Australia and worldwide in demonstrating that active citizenship has great benefits for students in the present and for their futures. As active citizenship leads students to achieve educational outcomes and develop skills and knowledge to

seek justice, initiate change for the better and develop lifelong skills, it should be a central aspect of curriculum planning in Australian schools.

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Appendix A: Email to principal

Dear <Principal's name>,

My name is Mellina Scavone, and I am an honours student with the University of Tasmania. Under the guidance of my supervisors, Dr. Peter Brett and Kim Beswick, also from the University of Tasmania, I am conducting research into student-initiated active citizenship in upper primary school classes.

The title of my research project is:

**Perceived benefits for learners of student-initiated active citizenship in primary schools**

I am seeking two year 5 or 6 classes in two different schools (one class from each school) to participate in the research, and I would like to invite <school name> to be a part of this project. The requirements for participation are being in, working in or volunteering in Years 5 or 6, and the students taking part in student-initiated active citizenship.

Student-initiated active citizenship is the process of students initiating and carrying out their own action projects in order to seek some kind of change in their community or school perhaps working in partnership with a non-governmental organisation or with local government agencies.

The process will involve one 10-15 minute interview with each participant at the conclusion of any action project they carry out. Participation is completely voluntary, and participants are able to withdraw from the study.

Please send a reply detailing whether you are willing to have a class in your school participate in the research. If there is a class you feel would like to participate, please send me the class teacher's contact details and I will respond to you and the class teacher with information sheets and consent forms.

Thank you very much for your time,

Kind regards,

Mellina Scavone

B.Ed

Appendix B: Information sheets**Information Sheet – Adult participants****1. Invitation**

We would like to invite you to participate in a study to explore the perceptions of the benefits of student-initiated active citizenship for students and staff in two Hobart primary schools.

The researcher for this study is Mellina Scavone, an honours student with the University of Tasmania, under the guidance of two supervisors, Dr. Peter Brett, a lecturer at the University of Tasmania, and Associate Professor Kim Beswick, Associate Dean of Research at the Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania.

We would greatly value and appreciate your participation in an interview, which should take no more than 30 minutes per participant.

**2. What is the purpose of this study?**

This project aims to investigate student and teacher perceptions of learning experiences as a result of students initiating their own active citizenship projects, and how these projects may benefit students, staff and schools.

1. What meaningful experiences do staff and students have and witness through student-initiated active citizenship?
2. What obstacles do staff and students experience as a result of student-initiated active citizenship?
3. What role do school staff take in student-initiated active citizenship, and do staff view active citizenship in primary school as a relevant part of the curriculum?

This study aims to explore perceptions about how involving students in the decision-making process of active citizenship can impact upon students, schools, and teachers. Similar studies conducted in secondary schools have found that through student-initiated active citizenship projects, students feel empowered, recognise their ability to make a difference in the world, as well as develop emotionally (Levey, 2010). There is also some evidence at a secondary level of linkage between citizenship-rich and relatively ‘democratic’ schooling practices and raising achievement across the curriculum (Hannam, 2001). With results such as the above for students in secondary school, students in primary school may be able to experience similar or further benefits. This research will explore the extent to which these benefits might be replicable at primary school level.

**3. Why have I been invited to participate?**

You have been identified to participate because you are a staff member, teacher or volunteer working with students in year five or six in a Southern Tasmanian primary school undertaking active citizenship projects

The project is complementary to other studies conducted in the United Kingdom and United States of America on the benefits of active citizenship for secondary school students. The study is theoretically based on Hart's ladder of children's participation, which visually shows the levels at which students participate.

Your involvement is voluntary. There are no consequences if you decide not to participate. Having said this, we are hoping for two full classes in two different schools to participate in the case study.

#### **4. What will I be asked to do?**

This research project involves an interview. The researcher will be in contact with the class and staff, meeting them briefly and discussing when the class will be involved in their next active citizenship projects. At the conclusion of the projects, the researcher will make a time that conveniences the class teacher, and participants will sit a semi-formal interview (no more than 30 minutes). The interview will be audio-recorded to allow for transcription later, but all data will remain anonymous.

**Teacher/Staff/Volunteer Interviews:** These interviews will have set questions asking participants about their personal meaningful experiences and hardships as a result of the active citizenship projects, and their witnessed meaningful experiences, difficulties and benefits for students, community and schools. The interviews will ask staff to share their thoughts about the relevance of active citizenship in primary school, and whether they believe it is a valuable part of the curriculum. Staff will be asked to discuss their role in the process of student-initiated active citizenship. These interviews will be audio-recorded, and later transcribed. You will have an opportunity to review a transcript of your interview.

We are conducting this research between October 2013 and March 2014.

#### **5. Are there any possible benefits from participation in this study?**

The research will contribute to the Australian literature about active citizenship, thus providing benefits for school staff and students alike. For the students, the research will highlight the benefits and obstacles of active citizenship opportunities in primary school, giving an indication of what active citizenship can look like in the primary school curriculum. For school staff, the research will contribute to either confirming or refuting their approach to active citizenship in the upper primary school.

If results prove that student-initiated active citizenship does have significant benefits in primary school, the wider community will benefit considerably from the action plans students will carry out. The students will be better prepared for their futures as active and global citizens, and students will be encouraged to initiate change in their communities.

#### **6. Are there any possible risks from participation in this study?**



We do not foresee any risks from participation in this study but please let us know if you have any concerns.

**7. What if I change my mind during or after the study?**

You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time, and can do so without providing an explanation. If you wish to withdraw please contact the researcher using the contact details provided on this sheet, or contact the school principal.

If you choose to withdraw (for example after being interviewed) relevant data will be destroyed. For example, files will be deleted from computer hard-drives and servers, and electronic “rubbish bins” emptied and paper documents will be securely shredded.

**8. When this study is over?**

The University of Tasmania must hold all raw data for a period of at least five (5) years from the date of first publication. The data will be destroyed after five (5) years.

Interview recordings will be stored within electronic files accessed via a password-protected computer within the School of Education at the University of Tasmania. Paper copies used for the qualitative analysis of interviews will be kept in a locked filing cabinet accessible only to the researchers. All data will be accessed only by the researchers. The data will be treated in a confidential manner.

**9. How will the results of the study be published?**

Schools and participants will remain anonymous in the research. When the study is complete, a link to the paper will be emailed to adult participants, and a link will be given to teachers to distribute to students and/or parents.

The data collected will be made re-identifiable through the use of either pseudonyms and/or research codes. This will ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of individual participants in the publication or dissemination of any findings from this research.

**10. What if I have questions about this study?**

Our contact details are:

Mellina Scavone - [mellinas@utas.edu.au](mailto:mellinas@utas.edu.au) Tel. 6430 4999

Peter Brett - [peter.brett@utas.edu.au](mailto:peter.brett@utas.edu.au) Tel. 6430 4932

Kim Beswick - [kim.beswick@utas.edu.au](mailto:kim.beswick@utas.edu.au) Tel. 6324 3167

“This study has been approved by the Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study, please contact the Executive Officer of the HREC (Tasmania) Network on (03) 6226 7479 or email

human.ethics@utas.edu.au. The Executive Officer is the person nominated to receive complaints from research participants. Please quote ethics reference number H0013417.”

This information sheet is for you to keep.

You will need to provide your consent to be involved.

### **Information Sheet - Parents**

#### **1. Invitation**

We would like to invite your child to participate in a study to explore the perceptions of the benefits of student-initiated active citizenship for students and staff in two Hobart primary schools.

The researcher for this study is Mellina Scavone, an honours student with the University of Tasmania, under the guidance of two supervisors, Dr. Peter Brett, a lecturer at the University of Tasmania, and Associate Professor Kim Beswick, Associate Dean of Research at the Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania.

We would greatly value and appreciate your child’s participation in an interview, which should take no more than 30 minutes per participant.

#### **2. What is the purpose of this study?**

This project aims to investigate student and teacher perceptions of learning experiences as a result of students initiating their own active citizenship projects, and how these projects may benefit students, staff and schools.

Active citizenship is taking action to better lives, the community or the wider world, which can be as small as assisting at a fundraiser, to a large as running a worldwide campaign.

1. What meaningful experiences do staff and students have and witness through student-initiated active citizenship?

2. What obstacles do staff and students experience as a result of student-initiated active citizenship?

3. What role do school staff take in student-initiated active citizenship, and do staff view active citizenship in primary school as a relevant part of the curriculum?

This study aims to uncover perceptions about how involving students in the decision-making process of active citizenship can impact upon students, schools, and teachers. Similar studies conducted in secondary schools have found that through student-initiated active citizenship projects, students feel empowered, recognise their ability to make a difference in the world, as well as develop emotionally (Levey, 2010).

### **3. Why has my child been invited to participate?**

Your child has been identified to participate because he/she is currently a student in year five or six class undertaking, or having recently undertaken an active citizenship project.

Your child's involvement is voluntary. There are no consequences if your child decides not to participate. Having said this, we are hoping for two full classes in two different schools to participate in the case study. If you and your child both give consent, then your child wishes to withdraw, please let your class teacher know or contact the researcher directly using the contact details provided.

### **4. What will my child be asked to do?**

This research project involves an interview. The researcher will be in contact with the class and staff, meeting them briefly and discussing when the class will be involved in their next active citizenship projects. At the conclusion of the projects, the researcher will make a time that conveniences the class teacher, and participants will sit a semi-formal interview (no more than 30 minutes). The interview will be audio-recorded to allow for transcription later, but all data will remain anonymous.

**Student focus group Interviews:** Students will be asked about the active citizenship projects they had just initiated, whether they had meaningful experiences and how they felt about active citizenship. The interviews will ask if students felt the process was meaningful enough to repeat, as well as any obstacles they experienced as a result of the action projects. Students will have opportunity to share their experiences, and whether they felt there were benefits for themselves and others. Students will be asked to share how the process of taking action made them feel. These interviews will be audio-recorded, and later transcribed. Participants will have opportunity to review a transcript of their interview.

We are conducting this research between October 2013 and March 2014.

### **5. Are there any possible benefits from participation in this study?**

The research will contribute to the Australian literature about active citizenship, thus providing benefits for school staff and students alike. For the students, the research will highlight the benefits and obstacles of active citizenship opportunities in primary school, giving an indication of what active citizenship can look like in the primary school curriculum. For school staff, the research will contribute to literature about the purposes, benefits and disadvantages of student-initiated active citizenship.

If results prove that student-initiated active citizenship does have significant benefits in primary school, the wider community will benefit considerably from the action plans students will carry out. The students will be better prepared for their futures as active and global citizens, and students will be encouraged to initiate change in their communities.

### **6. Are there any possible risks from participation in this study?**

We do not foresee any risks from participation in this study but please let us know if you have any concerns.

**7. What if my child changes his/her mind during or after the study?**

Your child is free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time, and can do so without providing an explanation. The researcher's contact details are listed, or just contact your class teacher.

If your child chooses to withdraw (for example after being interviewed) relevant data will be destroyed. For example, files will be deleted from computer hard-drives and servers, and electronic "rubbish bins" emptied and paper documents will be securely shredded.

**8. When this study is over?**

The University of Tasmania must hold all raw data for a period of at least five (5) years from the date of first publication. The data will be destroyed after five (5) years.

Interview recordings will be stored within electronic files accessed via a password-protected computer within the School of Education at the University of Tasmania. Paper copies used for the qualitative analysis of interviews will be kept in a locked filing cabinet accessible only to the researchers. All data will be accessed only by the researchers. The data will be treated in a confidential manner.

**9. How will the results of the study be published?**

Schools and participants will remain anonymous in the research. When the study is complete, a link to the paper will be emailed to adult participants, and a link will be given to teachers to distribute to students and/or parents.

The data collected will be made re-identifiable through the use of either pseudonyms and/or research codes. This will ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of individual participants in the publication or dissemination of any findings from this research.

**10. What if I have questions about this study?**

Our contact details are:

Mellina Scavone - [mellinas@utas.edu.au](mailto:mellinas@utas.edu.au) Tel. 6430 4999

Peter Brett - [peter.brett@utas.edu.au](mailto:peter.brett@utas.edu.au) Tel. 6430 4932

Kim Beswick - [kim.beswick@utas.edu.au](mailto:kim.beswick@utas.edu.au) Tel. 6324 3167

"This study has been approved by the Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study, please contact the Executive Officer of the HREC (Tasmania) Network on (03) 6226 7479 or email

human.ethics@utas.edu.au. The Executive Officer is the person nominated to receive complaints from research participants. Please quote ethics reference number H0013417.”

This information sheet is for you to keep.

You and your child will both need to provide consent for your child to be involved.

## **Information Sheet - Students**

### **1. Invitation**

We would like to invite you to take part in a study about what you believe are the positive and negative parts of your active citizenship projects.

The researcher for this study is Mellina Scavone, an honours student with the University of Tasmania, under the guidance of two supervisors, Dr. Peter Brett, a lecturer at the Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania, and Associate Professor Kim Beswick, Associate Dean of Research, Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania.

We would greatly appreciate your participation in a small group interview, alongside 2-4 of your classmates, which should take no more than 30 minutes per group.

### **2. What is the purpose of this study?**

This project aims to investigate how you think active citizenship affects you, your teachers and your schools.

This study aims to discover what you think about active citizenship, what you think you have learned, what you enjoyed and what you found difficult about initiating your own active citizenship projects.

### **3. Why have I been invited to participate?**

You have been invited to participate because you are currently a student in year five or six in a Hobart primary school. As a student currently involved in active citizenship projects, you are invited to participate in the study.

Your involvement is voluntary. It is fine if you decide not to participate. Having said this, we are hoping for two full classes in two different schools to be part of the research.

### **4. What will I be asked to do?**

This research project involves a small group interview with 2-4 of your classmates. The researcher will be in contact with your teachers, meeting you and the teacher briefly and discussing when you will be involved in your next active citizenship project. When you have finished your project, the researcher will make a time that is convenient for your class teacher, and then you will be involved in a small group interview (no more than 30 minutes). The

interview will be audio-recorded, and you will be allowed to see a copy of what you said so that you can check it for any mistakes. The interviews will take place at your school, and will be at a time that is convenient for you and your teacher.

**Student Interviews:** You will be asked about the active citizenship projects you had just completed, what you experienced, and how you felt about your active citizenship project. The interviews will ask if you enjoyed your project, whether you felt that you learned anything from the project and what you thought was difficult. You will be asked to share your experiences, and whether you felt there were benefits for you and others. You will be asked to share how your action project made you feel.

We are conducting this research between October 2013 and March 2014.

**5. Are there any possible benefits from participation in this study?**

The research will show to other people what the benefits and difficulties of active citizenship are for students, teachers and schools, which might convince other schools to take action more frequently. More frequent active citizenship projects would mean more help for the community and anyone who needs assistance.

**6. Are there any possible risks from participation in this study?**

We do not see that there are any risks from participation in this study, but please let us know if you have any concerns.

**7. What if I change my mind during or after the study?**

You are free to change your mind about participating at any time, and can do so without providing an explanation. The interviews will take place nearby to your classroom, so there will be normal class activities for you to do if you choose not to participate.

If you choose to withdraw after interviews, all your data will be destroyed.

**8. When this study is over?**

The University of Tasmania hold onto all the data collected for a period of at least five (5) years from the date that the paper is first published. The data will be destroyed after five (5) years.

Interview recordings will be stored within electronic files accessed using a password-protected computer at the University of Tasmania. Paper copies of interviews will be kept in a locked filing cabinet that only the researchers can access.

**9. How will the results of the study be published?**

Schools and participants will be anonymous in the research, no names will be used. When the study is complete, a link to the paper will be emailed to your teacher.

**10. What if I have questions about this study?**

Our contact details are:

Mellina Scavone - [mellinas@utas.edu.au](mailto:mellinas@utas.edu.au) Tel. 6430 4999

Peter Brett - [peter.brett@utas.edu.au](mailto:peter.brett@utas.edu.au) Tel. 6430 4932

Kim Beswick - [kim.beswick@utas.edu.au](mailto:kim.beswick@utas.edu.au) Tel. 6324 3167

This information sheet is for you to keep.

You will need to sign the consent form to be involved, and your parents will also need to sign the consent form.

Appendix C: Student interview schedule**STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE****INTRODUCTION**

READ: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project.

As you have read in the information sheet this research is about student, school staff and volunteer's perceptions of the benefits when students initiate their own active citizenship projects. The interview should take no longer than 30 minutes.

There are 9 interview questions. Please feel free to give as much detail as you wish in your answers. If you are unclear about the meaning of any question, please ask for clarification.

I will make notes as you speak and, on occasion, might ask that you pause while I jot down particular comments that you make. Are you happy for me to do this?

The interviews will be audio-recorded in order for me to transcribe the interviews later. Are you happy for me to do this?

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:**

1. How old are you?
2. What comes into your head when I say the words 'active citizenship'?
3. Tell me about your involvement in active citizenship at school? What is your role in the process?
4. What effect, if any, do you think your involvement in active citizenship has on your schoolwork and homework?
5. How do you think your parents and teachers feel about any effects active citizenship has on your schoolwork?
6. Tell me about your last active citizenship project. How did it make you feel? What were the most meaningful parts of the experience?
7. Do you feel that your active citizenship project has changed you or the way you think at all? If so, how?
8. Was there anything difficult or challenging about your active citizenship project? If so, what were the difficulties and how did you overcome them?
9. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience with active citizenship?

*This concludes the questions for the interview. Thank you very much for your responses. You will get to see a copy of the transcripts (which is a script of what you have said today) to check before they are analysed. If you have any questions, or would like any further information on the study please feel free to call or email me, my contact details are on the information sheet.*



Appendix D: Adult interview schedule**ADULT INTERVIEW****INTRODUCTION**

READ: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project.

As you have read in the information sheet this research is about student, school staff and volunteer's perceptions of the benefits when students initiate their own active citizenship projects. The interview should take no longer than 30 minutes.

There are 9 interview questions. Please feel free to give as much detail as you wish in your answers. If you are unclear about the meaning of any question, please ask for clarification.

I will make notes as you speak and, on occasion, might ask that you pause while I jot down particular comments that you make. Are you happy for me to do this?

The interviews will be audio-recorded in order for me to transcribe the interviews later. Are you happy for me to do this?

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How long have you been in the teaching profession/teacher assistant/volunteering?
2. Tell me about your experiences being a part of the students' active citizenship projects. Was it at this school? What is your role in the process?
3. What do you see as the aims or purposes of active citizenship projects in Years 5 and 6?
4. What do you see as the most positive aspects of active citizenship projects in Years 5 and 6?
5. What do you see as the most significant negatives about active citizenship projects in Years 5 and 6?
6. Describe what you think students learn from their participation in active citizenship projects? Does this apply to all students in the class? Which students benefit most/least? Why?
7. Tell me about any difficulties you have found with implementing active citizenship projects with Year 5/6 students? What would make it easier to implement active citizenship projects?
8. What impacts, if any, do active citizenship projects in Years 5 and 6 have on the rest of the school? The wider school community?
9. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about active citizenship projects in Years 5 and 6?

*This concludes the questions for the interview. Thank you very much for your responses. A copy of the transcripts will be sent to you to check before the data analysis. If you have any questions,*

*or would like any further information on the study please feel free to call or email me, my contact details are on the information sheet.*

Appendix E: Consent forms

Perceived benefits for learners of student-initiated active citizenship in primary schools

**Adult participant consent form**

1. I agree to take part in the research study named above.
2. I have read and understood the Information Sheet for this study.
3. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
4. I understand that the study involves interviews of up to 30 minutes that will be audio-recorded.
5. I understand that participation does not involve any foreseen risks
6. I understand that all research data will be securely stored on the University of Tasmania premises for five years from the publication of the study results, and will then be destroyed.
7. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
8. I understand that the researcher will maintain confidentiality and that any information I supply to the researcher will be used only for the purposes of the research.
9. I understand that the results of the study will be published so that I cannot be identified as a participant.
10. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without any effect.

Participant's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Statement by Investigator**

I have explained the project and the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

If the Investigator has not had an opportunity to talk to participants prior to them participating, the following must be ticked.

The participant has received the Information Sheet where my details have been provided so participants have had the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this project.

Investigator's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Perceived benefits for learners of student-initiated active citizenship in primary schools

### **Student participant consent form**

1. I agree to take part in the research named above.
2. I have read and understood the Information Sheet for this study.
3. The risks and purpose of the study has been explained to me.
4. I understand that the study involves interviews of up to 30 minutes that will be audio-recorded.
5. I understand that there are no seen risks for participating in the study
6. I understand that all data collected will be safely stored at the University of Tasmania for five years from when the study is published and will then be destroyed.
7. I have had all my questions answered.
8. I understand that the researcher will maintain confidentiality, and that my information will be kept private and not shared with anyone.
9. I understand that the results of the study will be published so that I cannot be identified personally as being involved in the research.
10. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can change my mind about participating at any time.

Participant's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**I have had questions answered to my satisfaction, I have read the above statements and I give permission for my child to participate in the research.**

**Parent/Guardian signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Statement by Investigator**

I have explained the project and the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

If the Investigator has not had an opportunity to talk to participants prior to them participating, the following must be ticked.

The participant has received the Information Sheet where my details have been provided so participants have had the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this project.

Investigator's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_