

**What future teachers & their  
Academics think about education for  
democracy (E4D) & why it is  
important– a study of the Australian  
context.**

**David Zyngier  
Monash University  
Australia**



Part of a global comparative & contrasting study of education students, teachers and their educators.

The research explores:

1. How are educators prepared to understand & interact with democracy;
2. What is & should be done to encourage a culture of democracy in schools
3. How education supports, cultivates and engages in/with democracy – how can controversial issues be addressed without being labelled a traitor or worse?
4. How can we evaluate educators to ensure that they are able to effectively engage with/in democracy?
5. How do education systems support, cultivate & demonstrate leadership in E4D?

# Research objectives

- **To identify, analyze and compare** the experiences, perceptions and perspectives of democracy, and education for democracy of teacher-education students, teachers, administrators, university faculty, and scholars, activists and members of civil society
- **To develop instruments**, measures, policies and curriculum, and to support educators in developing transformative education for a thick democracy



# Methodology & data sources

On-line survey instrument over 400 pre-service teachers & 50 academics

- demographic information;
- questions on democracy and education; questions on citizenship and education.
- questions on their experiences, perspectives and perceptions of democracy in relation to education & social justice.
- Quantitative and qualitative responses of the contrasting understandings of democracy from an established democracy.

Critical discourse analysis: - how education systems & teachers might conceptualize a more participatory democratic education, as opposed to neo-liberal citizenship & civics education (CCE).

- grounded in critical conceptual framework aimed to understand what causes unjust power relationships in schools and in society.

## *Our (main) Questions*

- What is a Democratic society?
- Is your country a Democratic society? Why? Why not?
- Is the USA a Democratic society?
- From your perspective, is the education system in which you were educated democratic?
- Are elections important to Democracy?
- Do you feel that you are actively engaged in democracy?
- Should teachers strive to promote a sense of democracy in students?
- What are you doing to promote democracy among students?
- What do you understand by social justice?
- Is there a link between social justice & democracy? Why? Why not?

# Conceptual framework

- The debate over democracy in education has for too long been dominated by a neo-liberal discourse that focuses on teaching ***about*** democracy highlighting legal & electoral processes - ***thin*** democracy
- ***Thick*** democracy seeks to solve social problems, improve society by questioning, challenging & changing established systems & structures when they reproduce patterns of injustice
- Through the notion of ***thin*** versus ***thick*** democracy, we conceptualize the visible tension between the superficial features often associated with teaching *about* democracy and the fundamental scaffolding which permits people to appropriate the deeper meaning of teaching *for* democracy.
- Teaching ***for*** democracy not just ***about*** democracy

## *Critical Pedagogical Framework*

- Barber's *Strong Democracy* (Barber, 2004),
- Westheimer and Kahne (2003) *Kinds of Good Citizens* - responsible, participatory and justice oriented
- Gandin and Apple (2002) *Thin & Thick Democracy*
- Carr (2010) *Does your vote count? Critical pedagogy and democracy*
- Carr, Zyngier & Pruyn *Can educators Make a Difference* (2012)



# Australia

- Pre-Service Teachers
- Teachers (not part of this paper)
- Teacher Educators



# Country context

- European colonial power with disastrous impacts on their indigenous populations
- Federal government, dependent states or provinces with limited autonomy
- Recognised as middle ranking power with a very high rating on HDI
- Australia has experienced continuous stable parliamentary democracy since 1900

# What is democracy - Majority

- voting as the voice of the people
- active engagement in democracy is about staying current with political issues through watching TV news or reading the papers
- personal freedom of opinion - able to speak freely without fear of retribution or punishment
- free and fair elections where governments are chosen by the majority of people

# Summary

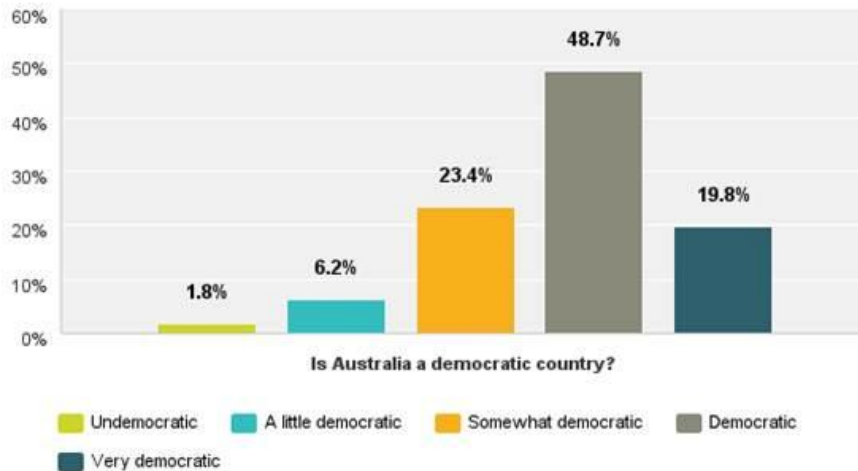
Political system for citizens inputs in decision making of a community, particularly through the vote in an election for the choice of a representative government of the consensus of the people, and regulated by a legal and institutional structure. The latter imposes responsibilities and grants the rights and freedoms, including access to a free vote, equality of persons, freedom of expression, for the benefit of the greatest number.

# What is democracy? - Minority

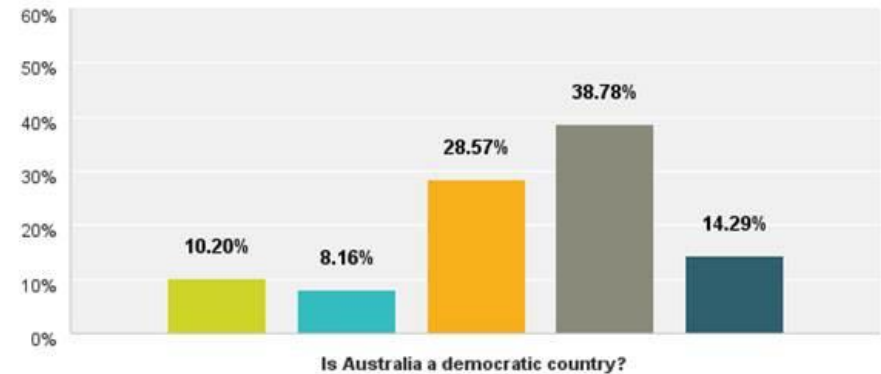
- recognition of universal human rights and laws against discrimination
- fairness and working towards equality for the people; power vested in the people
- a government powered by the people that promotes equality and social justice
- Democracy is intended to provide equality for all citizens of a country.
- Formal equality in terms of access to public systems of: health, education, employment etc.
- informal equality in terms of social systems, within the community.

# Do you believe Australia is democratic?

## Pre-service teachers



## Academics





# Do you believe Australia is democratic

## - Majority

“We are free to vote and speak out on issues that concern us without fear”

“Australia is a fair country”

“We have choice, rights and options in nearly every aspect of the community”

The government listens to what the majority of people want”

“Everybody is able to have a voice here and there is an equality of opportunity”

“Processes are equal, just and fair for all citizens.”

# Do you believe Australia is democratic

## - Minority

“The top 1% of population has a disproportionate influence and power over government.”

“some people have equal opportunities but many do not—indigenous people & refugees do not have the same opportunities or support so it is not equal and therefore not democratic.”

“We live in a pseudo democracy even though we get to vote and have a say it does not go far and is not really taken on board by politicians as they have their own agenda.”

“I don't think we have a very active democracy but only when citizens take a stand against government action.”

**“Masquerades as democratic** but not really. Is more democratic than some other nations although **has entrenched vested interests**, mainly capital that are very powerful and **exert dominance** over the democratic process.”

“I am dismayed by the number of people who are becoming **apathetic** in their response to govt policy. There seems to be an increased feeling that **'there's nothing we can do'**.”

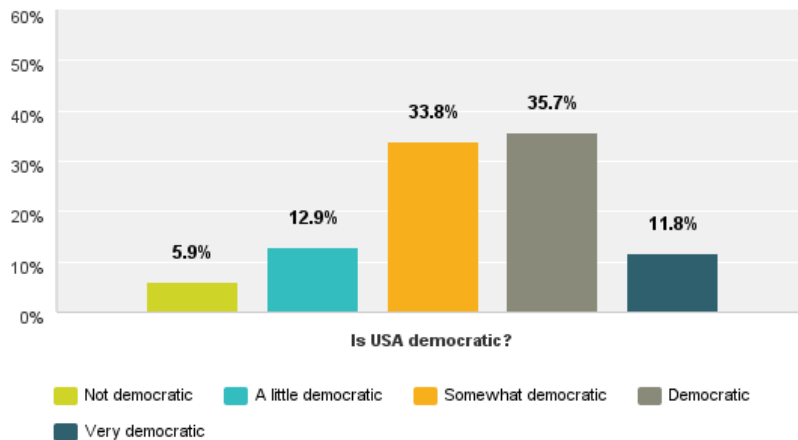
“I find the attitudes towards minorities (including those perceived as different by Race, Culture, (Dis)ability etc) **reflective of a wider, societal discrimination which appears to be culturally embedded (...)**; I see **abuse of power and the privilege of money and White Australian culture**, all of which I regard as undemocratic.”

# Summary

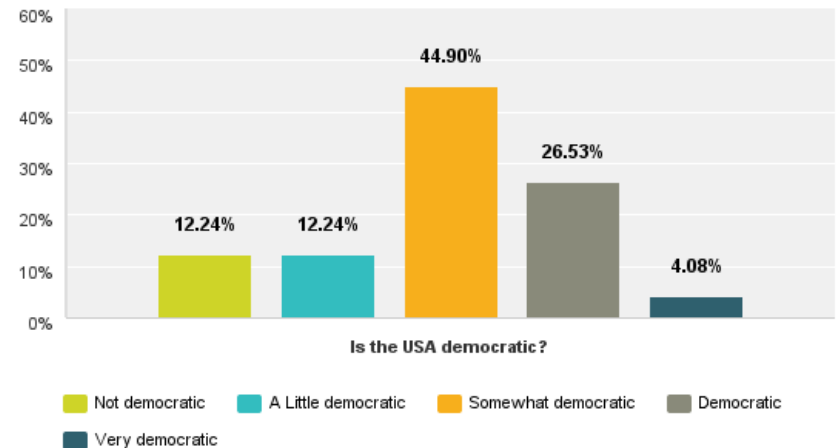
Australia offers an appearance of democracy through voice of compulsory voting, which would mean that the people are heard. But the hegemony of the richest, most powerful, & white, proves to be a major constraint to access to the democratic ideal, social justice and equality. The low inclination of the parliamentary system to represent the population, its excesses and abuses, collusion and polarization around money trends, and the medias' concentration and grandstanding presents profiles of systemic arrogance towards the Australian population, which suffers from a lack of public services.

# Is the USA Democratic?

## Pre-service teachers

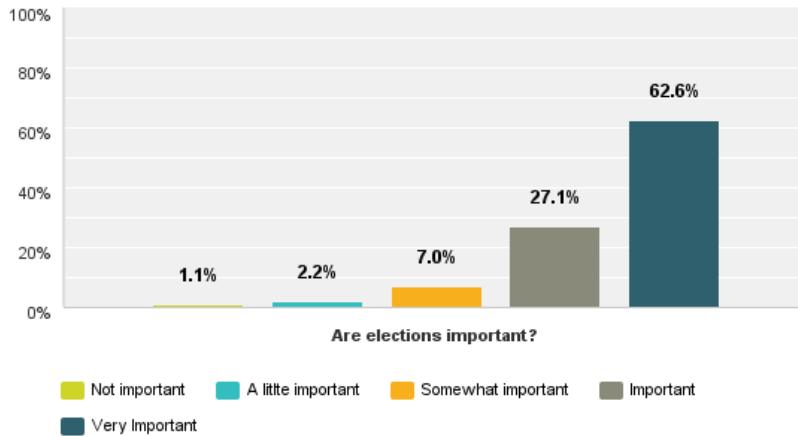


## Academics

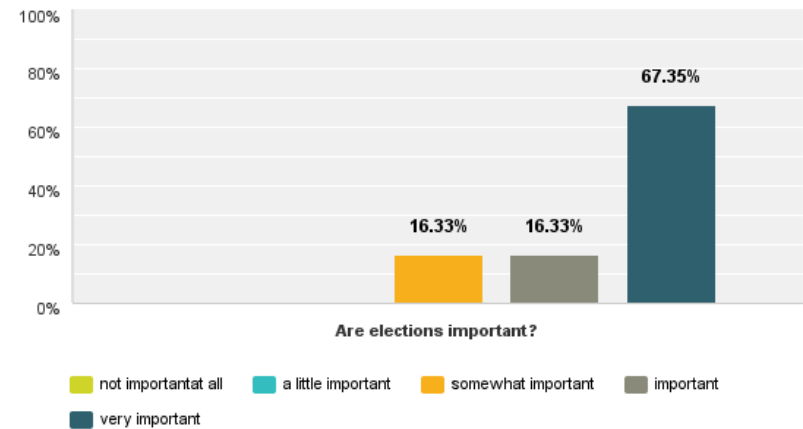


# Are elections important for democracy?

## Pre-service teachers



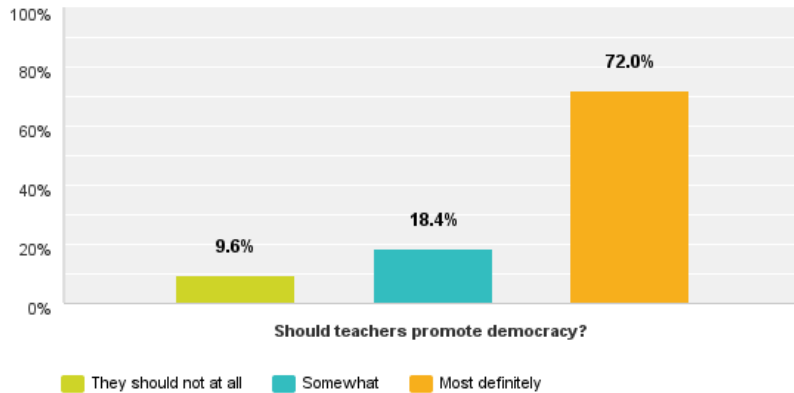
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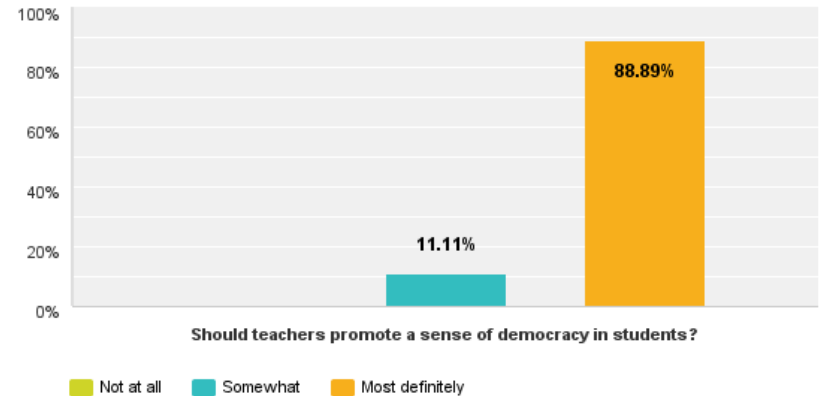


# Do you feel that teachers should promote a sense of democracy in students?

## Pre-service teachers



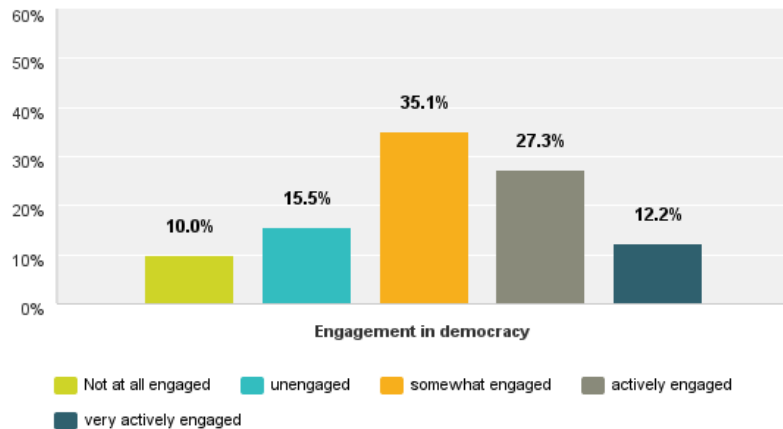
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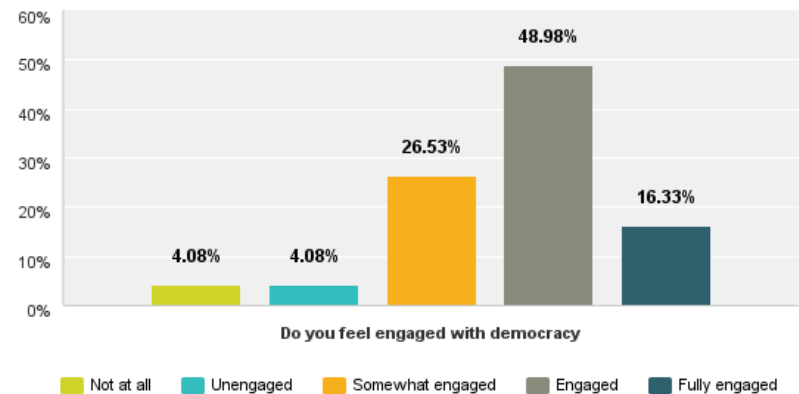
**“This doesn't have to be through "teaching democracy"...it can be through "teaching democratically". I think teachers have a responsibility to ensure that the society of the classroom mirrors as closely as possible the equitable society we hope for in the world.”**

# Are you actively engaged in democracy?

## Pre-service teachers



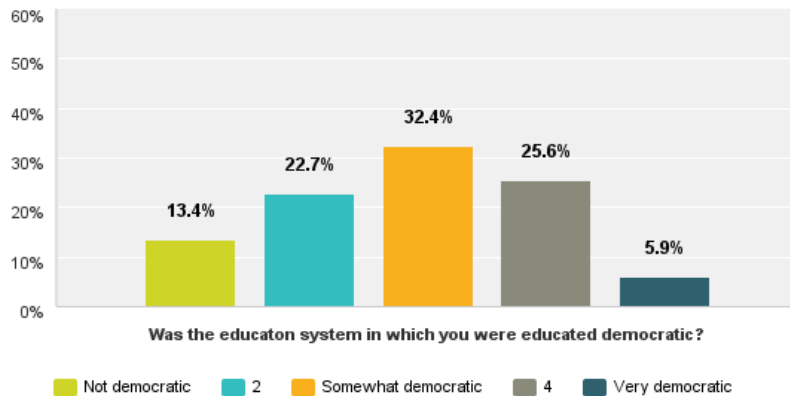
## Academics



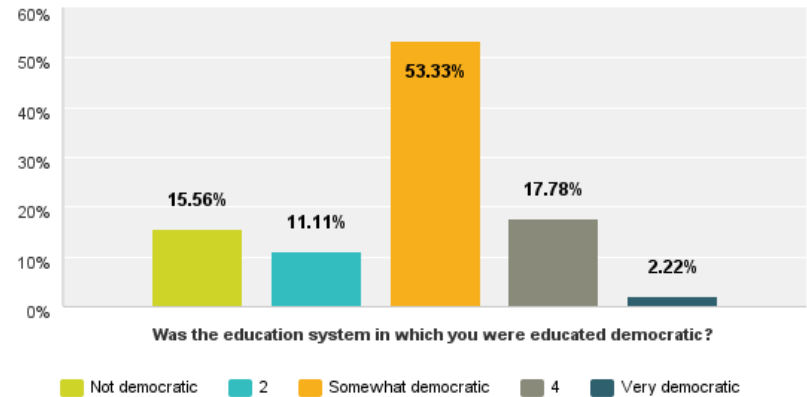
“Right now the most democratic thing any of us can do is continue **to expose the flawed system we have, continue to fight for the rights of ourselves and critically those who are unable to fight for themselves** for whatever reason, and to raise and demand alternatives.”

# Was your schooling democratic?

## Pre-service teachers



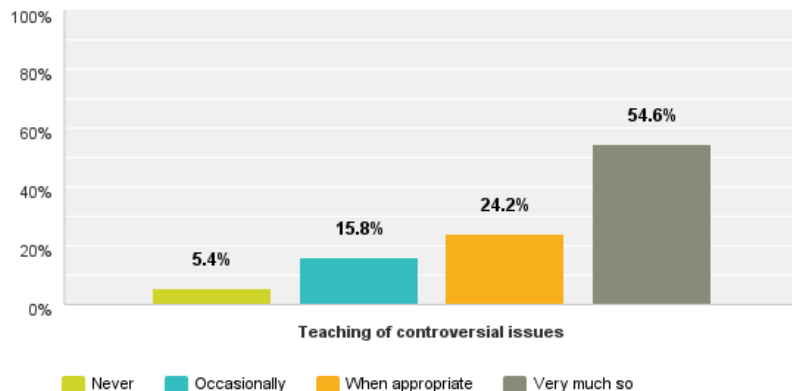
## Academics



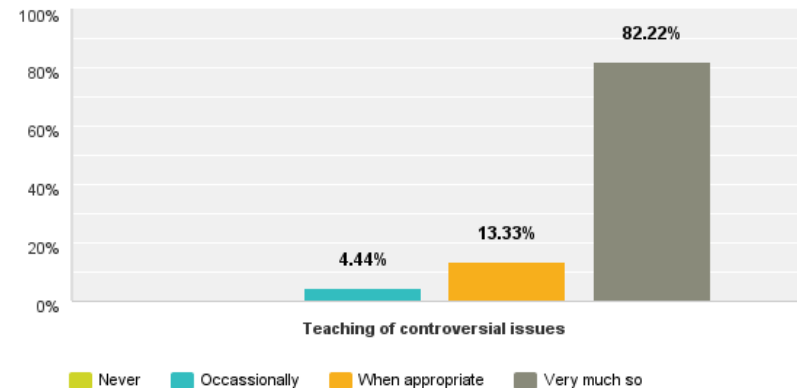
# Should we teach controversial issues?

## Pre-service teachers

**“Life is controversial. Education should create dissonance otherwise learning is not occurring.”**



## Academics

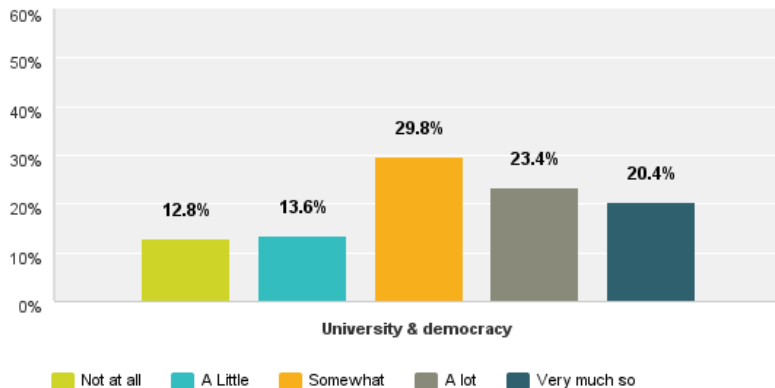


**“With care and professional judgment - the guiding principle is the best interests of the students development into an informed and critically thinking adult.”**

# University & Democracy

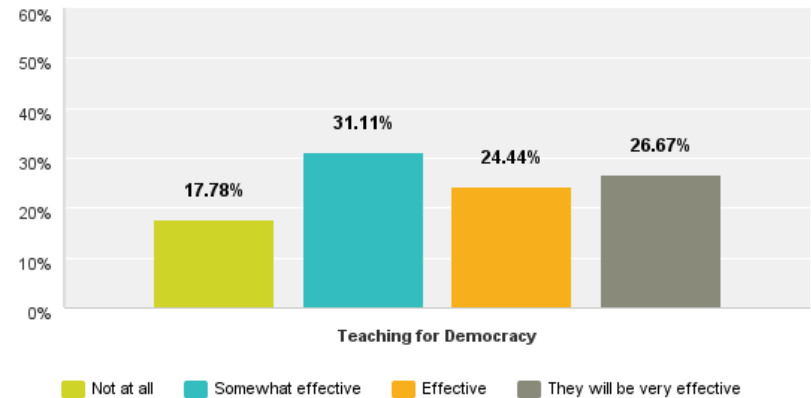
## Pre-service teachers

Has your university education contributed to your understanding of democracy?



## Academics

Are you hopeful that your education students will be effective in cultivating democratic education when they become teachers?



“Yes - but they can go through University **without ever having the opportunity to practice or learn about democratic education.** They may be doing it but not realizing that they are. **We have a global citizenship program** that is good and many students take advantage of this, but this is 'external' to their studies.”

# A Neo-Liberal agenda—rhetoric of active participation: Learning about but not for democracy

The vast majority pre-service teachers have limited view of democracy

Our research demonstrates that “teacher habitus”, how educators experience, perceive, and engage with democracy can impact on their classroom pedagogy. This has serious implications for how future citizens will themselves perceive understand and engage with democracy.

Social inequalities are caused by personal characteristics or supposed cultural deficits of the 'Other' position them to believe engaging in traditionally male-centred channels of voting or in formal political work will ameliorate society.

Consequently, few participants were able to recognize that deliberative democracy can only be actualized by exploring the "nature of multiple identities and the extension of civic rights to minorities, and in particular that a focus on the possible enhancement of rights" (Ross 2007, pp. 286-287).

Based on the participants' views I suggest several ways to broaden future teachers' view of democracy, citizenship, and the nature of social inequality



# Implications

***Shallow*** or ***thin*** views of pre-service teachers in terms of what causes *systemic inequalities* plays a key role in keeping in place *social inequalities* inside and outside K-12 classrooms.

Pre-service teachers' ***shallow*** view of what causes *social inequality* works to foster & reproduce a ***thin*** view of democracy.

# Significance

- Few have studied what *teachers* and especially *pre-service teachers* **think** about democracy.
- Even fewer have done any **comparative** study of this issue.
- Further understanding of how democracy is understood and undertaken within diverse educational and cultural contexts – USA, Canada and Australian - confirming previous research within this series of studies that argues that democracy cannot be disconnected from social justice if the object is a **thick** interpretation, learning for **participatory experience** and **critical engagement** on the part of students and teachers.
- We establish a link between critical, authentic, meaningful democratic engagement and a broad, inclusive, effective educational experience.
- The perspectives elucidated with a statistically valid sample of participants in multiple cohorts across countries generate insightful, comparative data about how **democratic education & education for democracy does or does not** take place in diverse contexts.