

Mapping the terrain –values education and geography

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Why values education?

Values education is not new. In many Australian schools values statements, or school mottos, are carefully crafted and written in ways that act as a constant educational and behavioural reference. Walking into the school foyer, staffroom, the playground or reading the daily bulletin will give a sense of what the school values are even if they are not explicit. Yet in other schools and for many teachers, values education remains contentious. As Professor Ivan Snook from Massey University points out, conflict not consensus occupies the values domain, and political influences in values education must be acknowledged within rigorous debate (Department of Education, Science and Training, DEST, 2005).

Following the circulation of a list of 10 values – as part of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) consultation for the Essential Learning Standards (The Standards) – the Melbourne *Age* reported concerns about the process of deciding whose values would be used in schools – whether they would be statewide or decided within schools. Concerns about hidden agendas, political interference and inclusion/exclusion were also noted.

What is values education? Does values education occupy the same territory as values *in* education? How do espoused school values become embodied in classroom practice? Which values? Whose values? Are they spreading? Can they be taught? Given the nature of these questions and the broader concerns about the politics of values, it comes as little surprise that education jurisdictions throughout Australia have attempted to provide a rationale for values education.

The current debate – while notably driven by the Australian Government – has emerged as part of a broader agenda to prepare young Australians to live in the global community of the 21st Century in which the politics and impact of terrorism, human rights and world poverty are ever present. It is also where drought, land care, and water management issues preoccupy us at the local level, and the continuing struggle to address the needs of Indigenous Australians confront us as a nation.

While students are exposed to a plethora of images and messages via television, mobile phones and computers, does it correlate that they are, or will be, literate, critical and informed citizens? This same technology, so integral to our consumer-driven world, allows us to watch from a distance. What do young people make of Australia's place in the global community? How do they interpret and respond to a Boxing Day tsunami or refugee children arriving at their school or the spread of Asian bird flu? What do they make of local water restrictions, land degradation or a change to electoral boundaries?

These are the kind of questions that occupy the values domain. They are also relevant questions for the geography teacher.

The preamble of *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century* states:

Australia's future depends upon each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills, and values for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just, and open society.

From a geographical perspective, goal 1.7 reminds us that: When students leave school they should have an understanding of, and concern for, stewardship of the natural environment, and the knowledge to contribute to ecologically sustainable development.

Jurisdictions throughout Australia have built on The Adelaide Declaration and many have more formally mapped their curriculum against core educational values as a way of describing essential learning for young people.

The *Tasmanian Essential Learning Framework* (Department of Education, Tasmania 2002) lists seven values: connectedness, resilience, achievement, creativity, integrity, responsibility and equity. A Ministerial Statement, *Values Education in New South Wales*, list nine values that it suggests "represent the aspirations and beliefs of the Australian community as a whole, including its concern for equity, excellence and the promotion of a caring, civil and just society". These values are: integrity, excellence, respect, responsibility, co-operation, participation, care, fairness and democracy (DE&T, NSW 2004).

What is values education?

In 2002, the Australian Government commissioned a national *Values Education Study* to develop a set of core values and principles for Australian schooling and the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools (National Framework). The study was unanimously supported by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

Two definitions of values were presented in this study:

- values are the priorities individuals and society attach to certain beliefs, experiences and objects in deciding how they will live and what they will treasure (Hill 2004)
- the principles and fundamental convictions which act as general guides to behaviour, the standards by which particular actions are judged as good or desirable. (Hamstead & Taylor 2000)

(From the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* DEST 2005)

Because of the nature of the values domain, these definitions can be contested. They can also be used to form the basis of common understandings and vocabulary. The Australian Government's nine core values for Australian schooling are:

- **care and compassion**
care for self and others
- doing your best
seek to accomplish something worthwhile and admirable, try hard, pursue excellence
- **fair go**
pursue and protect the common good where all people are treated fairly for a just society
- **freedom**
enjoy all the rights and privileges of Australian citizenship free from unnecessary interference or control, and stand up for the rights of others

- **honesty and trustworthiness**
be honest, sincere and seek the truth
 - **integrity**
act in accordance with principles of moral and ethical conduct; ensure consistency between words and deeds
 - **respect**
treat others with consideration and regard, respect another person's point of view
 - **responsibility**
be accountable for one's own actions, resolve differences in constructive, non-violent and peaceful ways, contribute to society and civic life, and take care of the environment
 - **understanding, tolerance and inclusion**
be aware of others and their cultures, accept diversity within a democratic society, being included, and including others.
- (DEST, 2005)

Again, these values can be contested, but they can also act as a reference for developing clarity about the actions, behaviours and standards that are central to a safe, caring and effective learning environment.

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS)

The Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA) articulated 10 values that were based on the same Values Education Study that produced the National Framework. The Victorian values were not proposed to be the subject of specific, stand-alone teaching or the focus of assessment of individual students. Instead they help frame five educational principles that underpin The Standards:

- learning for all
- pursuit of excellence
- engagement and effort
- respect for evidence
- openness of mind.

Michael White, then Chief Executive Officer of the VCAA, acknowledged in a 2005 presentation to DE&T staff that the development of The Standards reflect what we want our children to be:

- community members who can contribute socially, economically, and culturally to society
- responsible individuals capable of relating to family, friends, and colleagues
- informed citizens who understand and contribute to civil and community relations at a local, national, and global level.

In an integral part of the curriculum planning process for The Standards, schools are asked to reflect on the key values, beliefs and understandings as a way to identify their educative purpose. This is an important step for schools in describing what is agreed learning and how it will be achieved and measured.

How do curriculum statements, school mottos, charters, codes of conduct, vision statements or values statements translate into practice? What is the experience of students in the classroom and how does it relate to growing up in an information rich global community?

Geography, The Standards and values education

Geography is the study of physical and human environments. While the perspective is essentially spatial, the essence of geography is in the kinds of questions asked; what, where, how, why, what impact and what ought (VELS Geography p.1). In today's geography lesson the how, why and what impact questions are critical to students' evolving understanding of the world. Today's geography lesson is well positioned to make climate change relevant, to develop an understanding of why refugees come to Australia or to test the impact of land fill in their local environment.

Within The Standards, geography is located in the humanities domain and reflects, as does all discipline-based learning, a link to physical, social and personal development and broader interdisciplinary capacities. How young people understand the world and the way it works is integrated with their ability to think critically, empathise and collaborate with others. In the classroom this represents a focus on people, their relationships and their values as much as on their skills and understanding. Geography brings a value set to any inquiry of the interaction between people and environments.

The National Framework for Values Education defines values education as:

Any explicit and/or implicit school-based activity which promotes student understanding and knowledge of values, and which develops the skills and dispositions of students so they can enact particular values as individuals and as members of the wider community.

This definition of values education is broad enough to be inclusive of any key learning area. For example, in The Standards the learning focus for geography is dotted with references to protection of the natural environment and sustainability. Such values as care and compassion or responsibility underpin and foster student learning outcomes. This definition also brings into focus the relationship between student learning and the wider community. Here geography offers the students a chance to engage more broadly with community particularly in reference to the "geographical knowledge and understanding" dimension of The Standards.

For example, as part of their year 8 program, students from Malvern Central School annually spend up to five weeks at a temporary city campus at the top end of Swanston Street. During this time students travel to school by tram or train and conduct fieldwork in the Melbourne central business district (CBD). They traverse the Golden Mile, take a boat up the Yarra, and create a Physical Education program in the local parks and city baths.

One of the most exciting aspects of this program is not the curriculum content, which in itself is enormously interesting, but the development of interrelationships between the students, their teachers, and their environment. The school goals emphasise negotiated and integrated curriculum, student social skills, independence and collaboration. The students are excited by the fact they are given choice and freedom to explore their city in the context of an underlying set of explicit values represented by honesty, trust and responsibility (Education Foundation, 2004).

For geography educators the focus on values education provides a way to participate in the broader conversation about values. This is important given the current debates about the health of the planet and the continuing tensions over world resources and boundaries. Students too need to participate in this conversation and could

incorporate intellectual values such as freedom, respect for the environment or cultural diversity. These values relate as well to Malvern Central's study of the Melbourne CBD as they do to a study of forests or preparing a tourist map of Shepparton.

Grants for values education forums

The Values Education Forums Project has been funded by the Australian Government with the expectation that all schools in Australia conduct a Values Education Forum/activity during 2005 to 2008. Grants of up to \$800 are now available for Victorian schools to reflect and develop an understanding of values education within the context of the current education climate.

Victoria's response to the Australian Government's approach to values education therefore takes account of the complementary nature of The Standards and National Framework and the context in which schools operate by:

- recognising that individual schools will develop their own approaches to values education, reflecting broader understanding of shared personal and social values and the needs of the school community
- encouraging local school communities to articulate their values as part of their planning processes
- targetting professional development by regions and dioceses to school teams which emphasises a whole-school approach
- enabling school communities to consider what place values education plays in their school policies and practice, and how to sustain values education in the curriculum and policies.

Schools can now apply for these grants. Guidelines and an application form can be downloaded from <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/sose/valueded/>

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