

VALUES EDUCATION NSW FOCUS GROUP

DATE OF FORUM 27 February 2004

TIME OF FORUM 9.30am – 11.30am

VENUE Narara Valley High School, Fountains Road, Narara, NSW, 2250

PROGRAM DETAIL

The aim of the New South Wales Focus Group was to investigate the role values play in establishing Australia's identity, addressing the focus question "A Question of Identity: What does it mean to be an Australian?". Further to this, the focus group investigated the role of values within their specific subject areas, analysing and comparing this with general information about values in education. The participants were all teachers from Narara Valley High School and were a diverse yet representative combination of experienced teachers, beginning teachers and staff who were teaching outside their subject area for the first time.

PARTICIPANTS

Name	Organisation/Position
Julianne Beek	Head Teacher Welfare
Bernie Howitt	Head Teacher History
Kathy Smith	Human Society & Its Environment Teacher
John Lewis	Head Teacher Geography
Susan Thomas	English / Drama Teacher
Michaela Bailey	History / Society & Culture Teacher (Beginning Teacher)
Brent Walker	Head Teacher English
Kerry Waight	Human Society & Its Environment Teacher
Christina Neville	History / Human Society & Its Environment Teacher
Michael Britt	History / English Teacher
Craig Crispin	History Teacher
Barbara Aitkin	English / History Teacher

Subjects taught by the participants include:

- History (Stage 4 & 5)
- Ancient History (Stage 6)
- Modern History (Stage 6)
- Geography (Stage 4, 5 & 6)
- English (Stage 4, 5 & 6)
- Legal Studies (Stage 6)
- Business Studies (Stage 6)
- Drama (Stage 5 & 6)
- Society and Culture (Stage 6)
- Retail Operations VET (Stage 6)
- Aboriginal Studies (Stage 5 & 6)

1. OVERVIEW OF FORUM DISCUSSION

Organisation of the forum was as follows:

(a) Introduction

We began with a discussion around the statement: *Public schools are values neutral*. This was designed to promote discussion and allow teachers to start identifying specific values and how they are delivered. Issues that were raised in this initial discussion include:

- Whose values are we teaching?
- Do we deliberately teach values or are they just a byproduct of our own experiences?
- Should they be delivered at all?

(b) Definition

Participants were issued with a copy of:

- Definitions of Values and Values Education
- Guiding Principals
- Ten Values

as outlined in the *Values Education Study: Executive Summary Final Report* August 2003.

(c) Discussion

Participants were divided into small deliberately mixed groups (faculty areas and experience) to discuss information about values from the Stimulus Material supplied from Summary from EQ Australia, Curriculum Corporation, Melbourne (Dec 2003). This was in the context of individual subject areas but the discussion was focused around general education.

(d) Activity

Where do we teach values within our curriculum? 10 posters were placed around the room and participants were invited to move from one value to the next and write where each value was addressed within their syllabuses. They were encouraged to be as specific as they could be – many added direct information about their content area, resources utilized and the creation of a quality learning environment in the classroom through values education.

(e) Closure

The individuals returned to the group to discuss the results and to address the following:

A question of identity: What does it mean to be Australian?

2. KEY ISSUES AS THEY RELATE TO VALUES EDUCATION, AND THE TEACHING OF CIVICS AND CITIZENSHIP

(a) Introduction

The opening discussion around the statement: *Public schools are values neutral* was a useful activity as it prompted participants to think about how they teach values within education. It was a good 'ice breaker' and it allowed teachers to discuss the issues involved in values education. The discussion raised the variety of approaches/opinions typical of any group of teachers reviewing the issue of values. Some teachers saw values education as being integral to their teaching area – others saw it as an area of concern and admitted that they were conscious of not influencing students in discussions. The key area of convergence to emerge from this preliminary discussion was that teachers readily agreed that we are all a product of our contexts - but should there be a set of almost universal values inherent in not just a school settings but society in general? If so, who develops this list of values and whose values do they represent?

(b) Definition and discussion

Generally participants were in agreement about the ten values that were represented. There was some discussion about the interpretation of the values, but agreement that they generally reflected the values that they had been discussing in the opening session. Teachers were looking beyond their specific subject area and discussions also revolved around whole school welfare initiatives and programs and their role in values education, further consolidating the belief that values could be seen as basically "universal".

As one participant remarked: "The discussion consolidated the belief I have that values underpin education in general, and that they could play a valuable role in giving a whole school focus to a school through initiatives such as welfare and post school opportunities." The discussion was also seen to play a key role in allowing teachers to see the role of values critically extending beyond narrow subject areas.

(d) Activity

This activity promoted much discussion and analysis of classroom practice and curriculum. Teachers who had initially been skeptical of values education were, after a review of the definition and the ten values, able to provide relevant and detailed information about the curriculum and material choices that were made because of the added values. It was discussed that their material may have been chosen for specific curriculum needs but that it often had relevance in general society as well – "Afterall, we are preparing the students for life after school". A participant wrote on the Freedom value page "The concept of freedom is intrinsic to the concept of History. At every stage the struggle for Freedom by individuals and groups is a significant component of historical understanding. From the issue of slaves dying in the service of the Pharaoh through to the reconciliation movement in contemporary Australia, the idea of freedom is the basis of lessons." Teachers recognised the link values can create with quality teaching - It is pedagogy that is significant for students.

(e) Closure

By linking the specific syllabus reference to values back to the question: *What does it mean to be Australian?* it allowed staff to relate the values to general society – as we ask students to do on a daily basis in *Quality Teaching* – it made it relevant. The discussion allowed teachers to reflect in an area of strength, their own curriculum, and then apply that reflection to the broader

area of education practice. It provided an invaluable link between a micro and macro perspective. As one participant stated: "What it means to be Australian can only be a political construct in a country that prides itself on a sense of multicultural identity and achievement. This is linked in History to a study of Stage 5 Australian History and the post war immigration movement."

The key issues were: 1) identifying and recognising the key values in Australian life, and the role they should play in education. 2) how the key question of "what does it mean to be Australian?" can be used to promote discussion of key values in Australian society.

The following is representative of the dichotomy of views expressed in the focus group. I would expect a similar response in the classroom. In a Quality Teaching framework, this would allow students to explore problematic knowledge by expressing a point of view, supporting that with evidence and developing a deep understanding of the issue of values in Australian society.

What does it mean to be Australian?

- Permanent residents regardless of origin, beliefs or cultural practices
- Country of birth
- Multiplicity of levels of identification – there is no one culture – Australia is multicultural
- 'A fair go' and is this relevant today or to a time past?
- Bush v city
- Larconic/laid back/sense of humour
- Sporty
- Egalitarian
- Wish to be known and seen as Australian
- Country of Birth
- Increasingly Americanised
- It is very difficult to come to any definite conclusion at a time when we are undergoing social/cultural change.

This further provided a direct link to civics and citizenship education. The strengths are that the values provide a natural underpinning of discussions relating to civics and citizenship issues. An example is the Stage 5 History – "Getting Things Done" - when is it right to protest? Weaknesses made clear through the discussion include the discomfort some teachers feel in dealing with the concept of "values" in a classroom situation – their fear of being seen to be condoning a particular viewpoint.

3. SUMMARY / SUGGESTED STRATEGIES RELATING TO IMPLICATIONS FOR CLASSROOM TEACHING.

The activities section of the forum allowed for the collation of a wealth of information about values education as it links with the participants subject areas. An example is the Stage 5 Postwar History units looking at elements such as the Vietnam War protest and the Green Bans. The following table is a representation of these suggestions as they relate to each of the 10 values outlined.

Targeted Values	Suggested Syllabus Areas	Texts/ Classroom Practice Included
Tolerance and Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - History – Colonisation & Contact History, Crime & Punishment in Middle Ages, Religious tolerance & understanding in Ancient Egypt - Legal Studies – Mabo High Court Decision, Redfern Riots - Society & Culture – cross cultural comparisons, equality, prejudice - Geography – Bias in the media, landuse over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aboriginal Texts – <i>Gracie, My Place</i> - Ethnicity – <i>Kominos, Looking for Alibrandi</i> - Elderly – <i>Surfing with Mr Pehovic</i>, - <i>Remember the Titans</i> - Classroom Practice – Accept all views and equality in the classroom
Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Society & Culture – Popular Culture – Rock and Roll history - History – colonisation – coloniser to colonised. - English – texts that promote respect for selves and others – respect for different cultures, religions - History – Stage 5 History – Australian Aboriginal , migrant and women's rights and history. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Otis Redding & Aretha Franklin's version of <i>Respect</i> (Race then gender) - Interviews with migrants conducted by students - English texts in other categories - Classroom Practice – class 'rules', school welfare system, uniform, behaviour
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Geography – Local Community issues – be active in the local area, environmental responsibilities - Legal Studies – legal responsibilities – voting, welfare - Retail Operations – Work placement / requirements - Commerce- responsibilities to vote, participate eg. lobbying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Lochie Lenard</i> - <i>Human Torpedo</i> - Newspaper/internet study - Classroom Practice – personal responsibility in classroom and develops students as independent learners – student ownership of learning
Social Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - History – Stage 4 – Colonisation – especially Aboriginal Australia. Stage 5- Egalitarianism, rights & responsibilities - English – Inequality in legal access (race, education, finance) - Retail Operations – EEO, Fair Trading Act - Geography – Letters to Parliamentarians, global citizenship - Legal Studies – International Aid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Remember the Titans</i> - <i>Fair Trading Act</i> - <i>No Sugar</i> - Theatre/university/roleplays – new experiences - Classroom Practices – inclusive – internet access, excursions for all despite financial situations
Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - History – Pacifists unit – role models - Geography – Groups such as Greenpeace, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School Magazine/awards/expo - Internet searches

	<p>Landcare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - English – texts about people achieving their personal best 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analysis of achievements in newspapers - Classroom Practice - Link Teaching and Learning to the Quality Teaching Framework
Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - History – Stage 5 unit on pacifists - Geography – care of environment & society – Clean Up Australia, Care Australia, Landcare Activities - Retail Operations – Personal Presentation/work placement requirements - Legal Issues – Provision of aid, social services, study of families - Society & Culture – future perspective – creation of scenarios that have care/compassion as a component - History – Egalitarianism in Stage 5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Windows</i> (Picture Book) - <i>Geneva Convention</i> - <i>Mr Petrovic</i> - Landcare & Care Australia websites - Classroom Practice – Caring for the classroom and classmates as a group – ‘looking after your mates’
Inclusion and trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legal Studies – Focus studies on Minority groups - Geography – Global issues study on the variety of experiences of Indigenous, migrant groups - Society & Culture – Incorporate different experiences & cultures of students into the class discussions - Welfare programs such as Peer Skills, Mindmatters, Adolescents Coping with Emotions (ACE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Raw</i> - <i>I Can Jump Puddles</i> - Classroom Practice – fostering an open and safe environment which encourages discussion.
Honesty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legal Studies – crime unit of work – legal consequences of dishonesty - History – John F Kennedy unit - History – Crime & Punishment in Middle Ages - Geography – Action/involvement in decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Thieves of Ostia</i> Novels - <i>Hurricane</i> Movie/book - <i>JFK</i> movie and resources - Classroom Practice – Peer evaluation, historical research and the concept of honesty that is embedded in the pedagogy.
Freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legal Studies – Rights and Responsibilities - Geography – Global issues – north/south countries - History – Medieval history – witches - History – Aboriginal Australia – Freedom Rides - English – texts that promote freedom of expression, racial tolerance, individuality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>The Hurricane</i> - <i>Mississippi Burning</i> - <i>Shawshank Redemption</i> - <i>Rabbit Proof Fence</i> - Classroom Practice - Freedom of Speech in the classroom
Being Ethical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Studies – Business Ethics – rights and responsibilities of business, code of conduct. - Retail Operations – Confidentiality in the workplace - Society & Culture – Research Methodologies - Aboriginal Studies – Community Consultation - History – Ethics in conducting historical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Frontline</i> - Analysis of the media through a variety of sources - Community members – eg. Local Aboriginal Community Members. - Classroom Practice – Academic Integrity (avoiding plagiarism)

	research - English – Bias/propaganda, Persuasive language, point of view - Legal Studies – the constitution	
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One of the reassuring findings to emerge from the group was the way that values education is intrinsically linked to the NSW Quality teaching document and an understanding of pedagogy.

The forum was an invaluable opportunity for staff from a range of faculties with a divergent knowledge base to take part in intellectual discourse. Participants responded that this section of the day was most valuable, not only for their specific subject area but also in understanding their approach to pedagogy and themselves.