

# Editorial



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The opening quote in the Social Education Statement (SEV, 2008) states that “Social Education has a crucial role to play in our schools’ curriculum and can provide one of the major vehicles to both maintain and transform society”. This positions Social Education as a proactive force in understanding and shaping societies and the world in which students live. However, over the past decade we have witnessed a decline

in Social Education in schools. In primary schools the curriculum often allocates an afternoon for Social Education subjects alongside cross-curriculum themes and projects. In secondary schools the VCE Humanities subjects such as Geography are declining in numbers, with subjects such as Business Management and Psychology forging ahead.

The trend continues in University departments. Peter Singer argued the importance of the Humanities (expressed as a liberal arts education) in an article titled ‘We must nurture the Humanities’ (The Age 27th July 2009). Singer advocates strongly for an education that enables and equips students to think about the world in which they live. He targets Humanities departments as the key to fostering such thinking through an emphasis on excellence in teaching. He cites Plato’s questions – Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? – as central platforms to begin student inquiry into the world around them.

I am wondering where students have the chance to wrestle with such questions posed from Plato’s time in a curriculum that seems so full and stretched. These ponderings are set in a context of discussions around national curriculum and the roles for SEV and SEAA in this process. I recently attended the Australian Curriculum Studies Association Conference in Canberra where emphasis on the national curriculum was evident. There were heartening aspects of the conversation – the cross curriculum issues were proposed as indigenous, sustainability and studies of Asia. However, the absence of an explicit purpose and vision for the national curriculum – the focus of current work on four discrete subject areas and the lack of the intent from The Melbourne Declaration into the national curriculum discussion and debate – was of concern for me.

I believe that a national curriculum should be building educated global citizens who can think and grapple with Plato’s questions. Singer affirms the importance of Humanities education:

“If our best-educated citizens have no idea how to answer these basic questions, we will struggle to build a democracy that can solve the problems we face, whether they are what to do about climate change,

the world’s poor, the problems of Australia’s indigenous people, or the prospect of a future in which we can genetically modify our offspring. An education in the humanities is as valuable today as it was in Plato’s time.”

This edition of *Ethos* brings a range of voices from the Social Education Victoria community. Peter Hoban writes of how new technologies can develop thinking skills into excursions at Sovereign Hill. Two experienced VCE teachers – Sofie Spiteri and Stuart Harridge – share their teaching of VCE Studies of Sociology and International Studies. In developing tools for thinking in the classroom, two units of work are included from the Understanding Cultural Difference through Dialogue resource produced by Centre Dialogue at La Trobe University. Gary Shaw from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development describes the value of Model United Nations as a way to enhance values approaches in schools.

The importance of global education is confirmed by Kimberley Crowley, who attended a six-week study program in the United States in 2008. This program not only enriched her classroom resources and practices but also left her with a more global view of the world. Megan Burke from the Global Education Project provides practical classroom resources and rationale for global education in the classroom.

I hope this edition of *Ethos* encourages you as educators to affirm the importance of Social Education in your teaching and the curriculum. A gathering of Social Educators from Australia and overseas will occur in February 2010 in Adelaide at the SEAA conference. I hope you can attend this conference, as ties of friendship and collegiality are renewed and the importance of Social Education in the curriculum is affirmed.

## References

Social Education Victoria (2008) Social Education: A Statement for Victorian Schools, Social Education Victoria

Singer, P (2009), We must nurture the Humanities, The Age, 27th July 2009

