



SOCIAL EDUCATION: A Statement for Victorian Schools

KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDINGS, SKILLS
AND VALUES FOR LIFE LONG LEARNING

Published by Social Education Victoria 2007

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<http://www.sev.asn.au>

“ 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. ”

A. Introduction

Social Education: A Statement for Victorian Schools has been prepared by Social Education Victoria¹ to emphasise and promote the importance of teaching Social Education in Victorian schools. It supports teacher practice and school implementation models within the domains presented in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS).

This statement:

- draws on and connects to a range of local, national and international policy statements and documents relating to key social education and active citizenship concepts
- identifies the strengthened presence of key Social Education knowledge, skills, understandings and values in the VELS
- connects compulsory and post-compulsory humanities curriculum to a broader social education purpose
- articulates social education skills for a changing world
- asserts the strong link between social education pedagogy and content
- affirms the importance of specific teaching and learning methodologies
- provides links to useful education web sites and other resources in the social education field
- draws on contemporary research about the correlation between students' experiences at school and their post-school commitment to active citizenship.

¹ formerly Victorian Association of Social Studies Teachers (VASST) See Section F for contact details.

B. What is Social Education?

1. An integrated focus

The goal of Social Education is to enable students to participate effectively in society, to make informed judgements and decisions and take actions to improve our lives. This goal involves the development of knowledge, skills and values, habits of questioning and reflection, analytical skills, an understanding of and commitment to democratic process, and practical knowledge and experience of social and political action.

The development of skills, values and understandings connects with learning derived from a number of academic disciplines. Social Education is a broad area which draws from the broad Humanities including politics, history, geography, sociology, anthropology, psychology and economics.

Students learn about:

- the historical, cultural and geographical basis of their society in particular and about other societies
- the environmental settings in which their society exists and how change has occurred over time
- the various cultures that make up this society, and the factors influencing culture including ethnicity, race, gender, religion, history, geography and others
- shared values and beliefs, as well as the values and beliefs of particular social groups
- the ways in which community decisions are made and implemented
- how societies are structured
- contemporary issues
- the ways in which the local society interconnects with the global society.²

2. Scope

Social Education interconnects a range of discipline areas. It provides students with an integrated focus on the critical issues of our times, linking understandings and key concepts from the range of disciplines described in Section 1. Social Education concepts can be taught as a 'stand-alone' learning area or within those discipline areas. In the latter part of the 20th century, the Social Education or Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) learning area brought together the subject areas of history, geography, economics or business studies and environmental education. Social Education curriculum and pedagogy encouraged teachers from a range of Humanities subjects to collaborate, co-operate and provide integrated studies units that drew on a range of disciplines in new and creative ways.

Importantly, the learning area articulated significant values that have been taken further in a number of national curriculum projects since 1988. These values involved students dealing with themes/organisers such as:

- Valuing Democracy
- Achieving a Peaceful World
- Achieving a Just World
- Achieving an Ecologically Sustainable World (See Section 3 for an outline of these themes/organisers)

In addition, Social Education includes several major perspectives providing important criteria for choosing content including gender, cultural diversity, global futures, technology, post-school and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

In 2007, Federalist Paper 2 *The Future of Schooling in Australia* emphasized the role of schooling in providing understandings and capacity to address current and emerging environmental challenges, curriculum which promotes social cohesion and development of capacities for global citizenship in students. While the paper suggests a structural approach which concentrates on disciplines, it emphasises the need for '*Skills such as problem-solving and the ability to synthesize, create and apply new information enable students to think and act across traditional disciplines*' (*The Future of Schooling in Australia: A report by the council for the Australian federation*, September 2007, p15).

In Victoria, Social Education in schools takes place across all year levels and is structured in a variety of ways. Schools structure Social Education as a 'stand alone' subject, within disciplines such as History, Geography, Economics, and within Civics and Citizenship programs depending on local contexts. At VCE level, Social Education programs translate into a variety of potential studies such as National Politics, Sociology, International Studies, History, Geography and Texts and Traditions.

² Based on the Social Education Framework P-10, Victorian Ministry of Education, 1987

3. Themes / Organisers

Social education in the curriculum offers opportunities to learn about significant and critical themes and issues relevant to living in the twenty first century. The following four themes have been chosen deliberately to build key understandings, knowledge, values and skills for students. Social Education strives to encourage and embed an education that promotes knowledge and skills towards a more peaceful, just, democratic and ecologically sustainable world. It is from this goal that the main organisers for the Social Education Framework are derived. These organisers are the values that the SEV holds important for students.

Valuing Democracy

Democracy means the government of the people and allows for all people the right to participate in the community. Democracy forms the basis of government in Australia and many countries in the world.

Students will develop knowledge and skills to build understandings around

- application of concepts of civics and citizenship which inform daily life
- systems of government both locally and nationally
- case studies of democracy and the pathways to democracy
- appreciation of the rights and responsibilities as an active citizen in a democratic society

Achieving a Peaceful World

Today we live in a world where issues of conflict surround our communities and nations. The importance of understanding conflict situations and striving towards peaceful strategies and resolutions is a goal for nations and the global community.

Students will develop knowledge and skills to build understandings around

- concepts of peace building between people, communities and countries
- historical, social, political, geographic, economic and environmental causes of conflict
- processes for resolving conflict using a range of tools such as mediation and negotiation
- thinking strategies to engage in actively striving for a more peaceful community, neighbourhood, country, region and world
- case studies of peaceful resolution of conflict
- valuing collaboration, respect, empathy and teamwork

Achieving a Just World

Our world is not equitable. Disparities exist between living conditions, across the world. Due to increased connectivity and interdependence there is greater awareness of such disparities. Every person has a right to basic needs of food, shelter and housing, however across the world many examples can be found of these basic conditions not being available as well as an extravagance of such conditions.

Students will develop knowledge and skills to build understandings around

- concepts of fairness, justice and human rights as applied across a range of contexts
- global declarations relating to concepts of justice, eg, UN Declaration of Human Rights and Millennium Development Goals
- case studies of justice, human rights, freedom programs which highlight the complexities and possibilities of a more just world

Achieving an Ecologically Sustainable Society

Over consumption is placing increasing pressure on our world's natural systems. Global warming is one issue experienced by all people across the world. Other examples include declining biodiversity, climatic extremes, and water and air quality.

Students will develop knowledge and skills to build understandings around

- principles of sustainability as they apply locally, nationally and globally
- action which leads to increased sustainability
- a positive disposition towards conservation of built and natural environments
- case studies of sustainability

“ Students need to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that enable them to take action as informed, confident members of a diverse and inclusive Australian society. ”

C. Social Education and VELS

Students need to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that enable them to take action as informed, confident members of a diverse and inclusive Australian society. They need to understand the political and legal systems and processes and the history that underpins them. This involves a focus on students:

- *understanding their identity and roles in the community*
- *knowing their rights and responsibilities as citizens*
- *appreciating Australia's role in the global community*
- *having the knowledge, skills and behaviours to participate in society and take responsible action in relation to other citizens and the environment at a local and broader level*

VELS 2005

In 2005, Victoria introduced the VELS which outlines the essential learning for students in the compulsory years of schooling. The key skills, understandings and knowledge that comprise Social Education have been retained and strengthened in a number of the curriculum organisers. Social Education perspectives are interwoven within the domains of The Humanities, Civics and Citizenship, Personal Learning, Interpersonal Development, Information and Communication Technologies and Thinking. The interwoven purposes invite schools and teachers to plan education programs that target the need ... *to know, to do, to live together, and to be.*(Delores Report: Education for the Twenty First Century, 1996)

Victorian schools have implemented Social Education programs in a variety of ways. Most primary schools utilise an Integrated Studies approach to incorporate Social Education into the thematic work undertaken by students. Many secondary schools are utilising an integrated studies approach with middle school students. Many schools offer Social Education as a compulsory Learning Area for all 7 – 10 students. Others incorporate key aspects of Social Education within History and Geography curriculums. The inclusion of the domain of Civics and Citizenship within VELS has encouraged many to audit existing curriculum for opportunities to increase content pertaining to this domain within existing curriculum and school structures and to make changes to ensure compliance with the Standards.

D. Social Education: Why?

The challenge for schools, regardless of curriculum structure, is to prepare young people who can not only survive in a global world, but who can constantly transform it so that it is locally viable, personally meaningful and socially beneficial. 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.

Warren Prior, 2003

Social Education is an essential part of a student's education; so they are able to democratically participate in the development of a society that has happy, creative and productive citizens. To be 'socially educated' is the activity of a lifetime. The skills, knowledge and understandings developed in Social Education have increased importance given that our societies and environments face huge challenges in the decades to come.

The continuing development of a global economy will rearrange the politics and economics of the emerging century. Economic activity, at least in the industrialised world, is evolving into the delivery of an astonishing range of services. Continual advances in technology and communications provide both opportunities and challenges but the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' is likely to widen as access to these technologies becomes more polarised.

The imperative for people to become active citizens and to develop practices that will work to ensure a sustainable world has never been clearer. As the world's population continues to grow, pressures on the environment will include desertification, destruction of arable lands, water shortage, disposal of nuclear and chemical waste, erosion, salination due to poor irrigation practices and a loss of biodiversity. Australia is experiencing acute water shortages which have accelerated discussions about how best to manage a range of scarce resources, and about the need for individuals to take responsibility for managing their footprint relating to a range of sustainability issues.

The movement of peoples due to conflict, food shortage and natural disasters has led to the late 20th century being labelled 'the age of migration'. This people movement has created more multiethnic countries and in some instances exacerbated the 'politics of cultural difference'. Defining events such as global terrorism and nuclear proliferation make the case for strong social education programs in schools incontestable. Social Education provides an active process for education systems and school to respond to these and other critical issues through clearly articulated curriculum and by connecting student learning with real life issues, problem solving and action on an individual and group basis.

Education researchers and social theorists point to a paradigm shift in the meaning of the word 'knowledge' as a key to understanding curriculum reform. Whereas once 'knowledge' could easily be linked to 'truth', 'facts' and 'principles', in the 21st century, 'knowledge' is increasingly linked to 'performance' or what it can 'do', and to innovation. Globalisation, social and economic changes, new information and communication technologies, including web based and multi-media technologies demand new approaches in our schools. A common catch cry has been the need to explore 'depth' at the expense of 'breadth' in an ever expanding 'world of information.' Core social education skills such as the ability to question and critically analyse information are crucial to achieving this depth of understanding, and are therefore central to the curriculum reform agenda.

“ *The challenge for schools, regardless of curriculum structure, is to prepare young people who can not only survive in a global world, but who can constantly transform it...* ”

E. Social Education: Teaching and learning

1. Principles of learning and teaching

It is not just the curriculum structure and content that makes social education such a vital learning area. The way schools and learning environments are organised, timetables are structured and most importantly, the way teachers teach, all impact on student engagement.

The connection between curriculum content and pedagogy is the focus of the *Principles of Learning and Teaching* (Department of Education 2005). Underpinning an effective Social Education program, the Principles comprise six statements about quality learning and teaching practices required for building effective learning communities. They are:

- The learning environment is supportive and productive
- The learning environment promotes independence, interdependence and self motivation
- Students' needs, backgrounds, perspectives and interests are reflected in the learning program
- Students are challenged and supported to develop deep levels of thinking and application
- Assessment practices are an integral part of teaching and learning
- Learning connects strongly with communities and practice beyond the classroom

From: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/teachingprinciples/onlineresource/default.htm>

The website provides opportunities to explore each of these six statements and to locate tools that support an audit of teaching practice.

2. Teaching and learning methodologies in Social Education

Social Education teachers often use Inquiry-based learning as a methodology. It is one example of an effective pedagogy. Other examples of commonly used methodologies form part of the Support Materials for this statement which have been placed on the SEV website. Resources which assist in designing appropriate school-based curriculum can also be found on the site.

Inquiry Learning begins with students' prior knowledge and experience and moves through a deliberate process wherein knowledge, understandings, values and skills are extended, challenged and refined.

The following Inquiry-based learning model is useful for teachers wishing to develop units of work.

Tuning in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement and gathering prior knowledge • Pre-assessment • Questions for inquiry • Goal setting • Students may require immersion in the topic if little is known/experienced of the topic
Finding out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiences, research and texts that add to knowledge base • Emphasis on gathering data first hand
Sorting out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising, analysing and communicating the information gathered using a range of learning areas
Going further	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising new questions • Extending experiences • Challenging assumptions • Students follow personal inquiry into own questions
Making conclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stating understandings – what do we now know? How do we feel? High level thinking about the topic. • Identifying avenues for action and application. • Generalising (should be done throughout)
Taking Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking action • Reflecting on the learning • What, How and Why learning has come about. What did I learn about this topic? What did I learn about myself? What should I/we do now? What do we still want to learn?

Adapted from *Basic Overview of Integrated-Inquiry Process, Classroom Connections*, p. 5, K. Murdoch 2004
Schools use combinations of models and processes as appropriate to individual circumstances.

3. What does it look like in practice?

<p>What does a successful inquiry process classroom look like?</p> <p>Inquiry is in the form of investigations into authentic (real-life) problems within the context of the curriculum and/or community. The inquiry responds to a student's 'need to know'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data and information are actively used, interpreted, refined, digested and discussed • Teachers, students and teacher librarian collaborate • Community and society are connected with the enquiry • The teacher models the behaviours of inquirer • The teacher uses the language of inquiry on an ongoing basis • Students take ownership of their learning • The teacher facilitates the process of gathering and presenting information • The teacher and students use technology to advance inquiry • The teacher embraces inquiry as both content and pedagogy • The teacher and students interact more frequently and more actively than during traditional teaching • There is an identifiable time for inquiry-based learning • There are actions which arise out of the inquiry. <p>Adapted from Drayton and Falk 2001, Tell-tale signs of the Inquiry Oriented Classroom, <i>NASSP Bulletin</i>, Vol. 85, No. 623</p>	<p>Characteristics of a socially educated student</p> <p>Students successfully participating in a comprehensive social education program will demonstrate the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands and can empathise with others • Knows about the world beyond their own experience and accept an obligation to keep themselves informed about significant issues • Values diverse backgrounds • Understands multiple perspectives and is able to weigh up alternatives, especially those relating to desirable futures • Develops and practices skills in investigating society, discussing issues, tackling problems, making decisions and working co-operatively with others • Develops and practices values for a just, democratic and sustainable world • Is able to think through consequences from the point of view of society as a whole, as well as from a personal standpoint • Understands the connection between knowledge, skills and understanding and taking personal actions on a range of personal and social issues.
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F. Social Education: Support

Social Education Victoria (SEV)

Social Education Victoria (previously known as VASST) is a professional association established in 1970 for all who are interested in teaching about society and environment. The organisation is committed to providing educational leadership and promoting quality teaching and learning in the Social Education curriculum areas articulated in this statement. Over time, SEV has vigorously affirmed the critical importance of social education in the curriculum, provided professional development to meet the needs of teachers from primary to senior secondary sectors of education, developed resources and provided forums for discussion of professional issues. SEV supports the work of education systems, curriculum authorities, other key professional associations, teachers, pre-service teachers and teacher educators.

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G. Social Education: Connections

Civics and Citizenship Education

Initiated in 1997 and premised on the conviction that civics and citizenship education is central to Australian education and the maintenance of strong and vital citizenship, Civics and Citizenship Education also supports the development of skills, values and attitudes that are necessary for effective, informed and reflective participation in Australia's democracy. In 2005, all State and Territory Ministers of Education endorsed the national *Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship and Civics and Citizenship Education* is one of the 14 domains within Victorian curriculum.

<http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/>

Global education

The Australian Government through AusAID has developed a number of policy and curriculum resources to support Global Education in schools. These include *Global Perspectives: a statement on global education for Australian schools* which aims to clarify the goals, rationale, emphases and processes of global education for all Australian teachers and students. The Global Education Statement argues that students develop understandings of many aspects of Australia's international environment through studying Australia's relationships with other countries and by exploring Australia's responsibilities and contribution as a global citizen.

<http://www.globaleducation.edna.edu.au>

Studies of Asia

The Australian Government has funded the development of a number of policy and curriculum resources about studies of Asia through the Asia Education Foundation. They include a *National Statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools* that identifies the broad knowledge, understandings, values and skills required to engage with Asia in the context of existing policies and practices in teaching and learning. Scope and Sequence curriculum documents for English, Studies of Society and Environment and the Arts describe how essential knowledge skills and values relating to the engagement of young Australians with Asia can be embedded in teaching and learning programs.

<http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au>

National Values Framework

The Australian government has committed to a comprehensive set of education initiatives around values education, including a National Values Education Framework, Values Education forums and Professional Learning modules

<http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/>

Knowledge Bank

Knowledge Bank is a collection of resources that supports the *Blueprint for Government Schools*, a framework for the Victorian government school system. Knowledge Bank provides case studies of exemplary and promising practice in Victorian education. Knowledge Bank also has Teacher Professional Leave reports and profiles current research in education and training.

<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/knowledgebank/browsecasestudies/default.asp>