A REGIONAL SURVEY OF PRIMARY SOCIAL EDUCATION: TRIALLING AND RESULTS

Ray Nichol
Head of Social Science Education
La Trobe University College of Northern Victoria, Bendigo

ABSTRACT

This is a report of a primary social education survey which was sent in November, 1992, to all state primary schools in the Loddon-Campaspe-Mallee region. It was devised by Social Science Education staff at La Trobe U.C.N.V., approved by the Regional General Manager, trialled in three Bendigo schools and then sent to schools for response and comment.

The results reveal significant gaps between policy and practice in many schools, huge differences in confidence concerning curriculum areas and a strong desire and need for support and inservicing in this field.

INTRODUCTION

The Loddon-Campaspe-Mallee region covers a large area of central and northern Victoria. Schools are located in provincial cities, such as Bendigo, Swan Hill and Mildura, small towns and rural areas. As national curriculum documents are currently being revised in recognition of the need for a new focus in both content and pedagogy it was decided that there was an urgency in assessing current practice in social education for the region (see Tudball, 1993, pp. 6-8).

Why devise such a survey? On a rather prosaic level it helps faculty and departmental staff to assess existing practice and to plan for future regional needs. More profoundly it provides a research model which appraises the implementation of *The Social Education Framework P-10 (1987)*. Follow-up interviews can explore, in greater detail, how individual schools adapt the *Framework* to meet their needs.

TRIALLING

The trial survey sent to three Bendigo schools which have strong social education programs. They provided detailed responses to all of the questions and some valuable suggestions which were incorporated in the revised survey. For example, the original survey had no preamble and few quantifiable categories and prompts. There were also many open-ended questions in the curriculum section.

In brief, the survey was designed to assess resources, curriculum development and inservicing requirements in social education. The results should assist both the University College and Directorate of School Education in policy development and practical planning for this region. It also provided an evaluation of the *Social Education Framework P-10* five years after its publication and dissemination.

POLICY

There is a great deal of rhetoric about this field but how successful is it in practice? This survey of an extensive region attempts to find out.

Policy statements by Ministries of Education place great importance on responsibilities of schools to *socially educate the young*, for example, see the Ministerial Paper 6, *Curriculum Development and Planning in Victoria* (1984). Content should include a heavy concentration on important *issues* of contemporary Australian and global society - environmental, social justice, human rights. Study of these should involve students in investigation, negotiation and decision making.

Individual schools in policy statements always refer to the need for students to *know* about their society and to *actively participate* in it. The *Social Education Framework P-10* states that such knowledge, skills, values and actions are *essential* (p.8).

In 1989 the *Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia* document was released by the Australian Education Council. This was formulated and endorsed by each State minister and the Federal Education Minister. Of the ten goals, *three relate directly to social education*, namely:

Goal 6

To develop in students:

* skills of analysis and problem solving;
* a knowledge and appreciation of Australia's historical and geographical context;
* an understanding of, and concern for, balanced development and the global environment; and
* a capacity to exercise judgement in matters of morality, ethics and social justice.

Goal 7

* To develop knowledge, skills, values and attitudes which will enable students to participate as active and well-informed citizens in our democratic Australian society within an international context.

Goal 8

* To provide students with an understanding and respect for our cultural heritage using the particular cultural background of Aboriginal and ethnic groups

The A.E.C. is indicating in the strongest possible terms *that social education must be a major component of any curriculum offered by an education system in Australia.*

THE SURVEY

Some of the key questions which the revised survey sought to answer were: How effective and sustained is this region's provision of this major component of the curriculum? What is the allocation of resources? Are parents and community involved? Have schools developed social education programs in response to the *Framework P-10*? It is only a skeleton; have social education co-ordinators, committees and their school communities developed it with policy statements and detailed planning for units and programs? Are the various curriculum areas (including history, geography, citizenship education and global citizenship) catered for well? What in-services have been provided and what are required? Are teachers interested in social education courses at the regional university? Would they participate in follow-up interviews? These are the concerns of this survey.

On November 23, 1992, surveys were sent to each primary school in the Loddon-Campaspe-Mallee Region, a total of 175. By December 16, 37 responses had been received 2 representing a low response rate of 21%.

The timing of the survey was somewhat unfortunate. Senior administrators had advised to " ... send it out late because schools are so involved with Advanced Skills Teacher interviews". However, the survey coincided with government cutbacks in funding for Victoria education and the resultant confusion and low morale was perhaps reflected in the relatively slow response rate. A few respondents expressed annoyance at yet another demand for response from harried teachers.

RESPONSES TO THE SURVEY (N=37)

Resources, Personnel and Time Allocation

A brief summary follows. Only three of the schools stated that they had specialist teachers and none of these had a major in a social science discipline or curriculum method. Twenty-one or 57% of schools had a co-ordinator. Most describe the role as being responsible for policy development and implementation throughout the school.

Only 10, or 27%, had a social education committee. Eight were located in small schools - one or two teacher schools- where a 'cluster' approach to school-based curriculum development could, but had not, been applied.

The hours allocated to social education, varied from zero to 6 hours per week. Most schools indicated two or three hours per week, with a significant minority stressing the integrated, thematic nature of its treatment and the difficulty of separating time for social education from overall allocation.

Half the schools involved parents in their programs, while 29, or 78%, included local community participation.

Computers were used in 51% of programs, usually Macintoshes for word processing, stimulation and information gathering activities.

School-based policy and curriculum documents were developed by 54% of the schools and many of the others indicated they were reviewing this field of study. The *Framework P-10* was used by 65% in their policy review and developments. Clearly the majority used the *Framework* but did their provision of curriculum meet the *essential* knowledge and methodological goals cited in the document?

Curriculum Areas

These questions were derived, in the main, from the Social Education *Framework P-10* and the school's assessment of where they do well is instructive and interesting. In Table 1 a summary of the schools' responses to questions on how well the schools' social education programs cater for the statements derived from the *Framework P-10* document is presented.

Table 1
Percentage Responses

Curriculum Area	Agree %	Uncertain %	Disagree %	No Response %
Popular culture	43	27	16	14
The historical basis of our society	73	19	0	8
Australia's cultural, racial and ethnic mix	46	30	16	8
The environmental settings in which our society exists	76	13	3	8
Current affairs and controversial issues	41	41	10	8
Community decision making	59	22	11	8
Things that bind us together and things that divide us	49	38	5	8
Citizenship education	51	30	11	8
The ways in which sour society interrelates with the global society	43	43	5	8
Global citizenship	24	62	5	8
Establishing goals and priorities	43	41	5	10
Clarifying values	57	32	3	8
The inquiry learning model suggested by the Framework	59	30	3	8
Social action strategies	52	35	5	8
Displaying the results of social education in your school	70	19	3	8
Integrating social education with other subjects	81	8	3	8

Clearly, these schools considered that they taught well our history and environmental settings. They were also confident displaying the results of social education and integrating it with other subjects. Moderate confidence was expressed about community decision making, citizenship education, clarifying values, the inquiry learning model and social action strategies.

Low confidence marked those areas which epitomise change and adaptability, such as Australia's cultural, racial and ethnic mix, current and controversial issues and the ways in which our society interrelates with the global society. By far the worst response was for the curriculum area concerning global citizenship. Only nine, or 25%, of the respondents considered that their school program catered well in this field. These low confidence curriculum areas require urgent response and support from school, regional and university specialists.

Few used programs from other schools, regions, states or commercial developers, but a small majority, 53 %, used the Parliamentary Pack.

Vagueness characterised the responses to the question about additional areas they would like to cover. However, there was no uncertainty about the need for in-service, with 84% expressing a need for support in this field. Most favoured was the one-day in-service. Only six, or 16% of schools reported some previous inservicing for the *Social Education Framework P-10*, while eight, or 22% had been involved in other social education activities in he past five years.

Requests for further information about social education courses and programs at the University College totalled fourteen. Seven schools would participate in a follow-up interview and 28 schools requested anonymity.

Extra comments ranged from specific requests for staff visits to schools, statements about the integrated nature of the subject's treatment in most contemporary programs, prophecies about a school's chances of survival, to detailed descriptions of visiting speakers, language studies, 'Aussie of the Month' citizenship awards, grade and school parliaments, articles in local papers and displays in schools and shops of the children's work.

· SUMMARY

Some tentative conclusions can be drawn and recommendations made:

1. There is a wide gulf between policy, state and national, and practice in many schools.

2. There are very few specialist teachers in the region and little understanding of the specialist's role.

3. Co-ordinators, however, are clear about their role and the need for outside support.

4. The survey neglected to explore vital areas of teacher change and actual methods of school-based curriculum development. Follow-up surveys or field work would need to address these concerns.

5. The committee model often is not working. Successful models should be available to support all regional schools.

6. Many schools do not involve parents in their programs. Again, successful examples would help all schools.

7.   43% of schools do not have a social education policy and curriculum document. Exemplars do exist.

8.   Schools appear to be more comfortable with the traditional historical, geographical focus. Less Traditional curriculum areas require urgent response.

9.   They are least confident with areas concerning change, particularly notions of global citizenship.

10. There is a very strong desire and need for support and inservicing in this field.

11. Over five years since its inception it is clear that in the implementation of the *Social Education Framework P-10* has been patchy and poorly received.

12. The survey may be replicated or adapted for use elsewhere, but please notify the writer.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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