A view from somewhere: The possibilities for values education presented by the IB Diploma curriculum model.

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It is a commonplace that curricula and pedagogies are never value neutral. Whether it be through the hidden curriculum or the null curriculum, or indeed via the sometimes covert power relations implicit in any process of teaching and learning (Gore, 2003), values education is in fact occurring. So this paper’s central question—where is values education to take place?—is to be understood to refer to explicit values education in schools. My point of departure is the Australian federal government’s National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools with its “Nine Values for Australian Schooling” (Department of Education Science and Training, 2005). Given the ubiquity of implicit values education in schools, I argue that explicit values education should have, at least as part of its subject matter, the curriculum and pedagogies of the school. Students must look at what is being valued; the implicit must be made explicit if they are to understand the values around them. I want to suggest that a space for students to evaluate the curriculum is needed and that the kind of space presented by the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program’s Creativity Action Service (CAS) and Theory of Knowledge (TOK) courses may provide just that. Such a space helps students locate themselves with respect to their currere to use Pinar’s (1975) term, their running of the course through their own curriculum. I hope to show that such a space enables students to position themselves, to realise that parts of their curriculum value differently and are never, pace Thomas Nagel, a view from nowhere, but rather always a view from somewhere. And putting students’ evaluation of their own curriculum at the core means students will themselves be undertaking curriculum studies.

Manne on the Armenian genocide.

Let me give an example. Robert Manne, in his 2006 History Council of Victoria lecture ‘Australia and Turkey: Uncomfortable Thoughts on Gallipoli and the Armenian Genocide’, which replayed on ABC Radio National earlier this year, explored “why Gallipoli and the Armenian genocide continue to exist for us in parallel moral universes”. He points out that while Australian analyses of the campaign rarely even mention the Armenians, the Allied campaign is, in contrast, part of the standard explanatory framework of any account of the genocide (Manne, 2007). It is not that he is presenting a so-called “black
armband” view of Australian history—for example he certainly does not see Australia as responsible for the massacres—rather, his point is that our proximity, where we stand, influences how and what we value in events.

Values education and the nine point poster

And driving along in my much-rattling Japanese-made car listening to Manne’s splendid lecture I got to thinking about the ‘Nine Values for Australian Schooling’ document. I don’t know how many of you are familiar with this poster. It lists: care and compassion; doing your best; fair go; freedom; honesty and trustworthiness; integrity; respect; responsibility and understanding and; tolerance and inclusion. And most of us, with some quibbles, would think this list is nice enough, as far as it goes. But why I thought of it at that point was because by far the most memorable thing about the document is that these nine points are written over a black and white graphic representation of Simpson and his donkey. And up above it all, a fluttering Australian flag in a very particular shade of blue: somehow the blue of Blinky Bill and pre-WWI biscuit tins. Asking some first year B.Ed students for their responses, it is clear that visually it conjures up a golden age, a better time, when things were in black and white. Many of them were astonished to learn the document was published in 2005 rather than 1955. The values are made to seem eternal, transcendent, essential to the Australian character. It draws on historical representations but, like most curriculum documents one meets with, it presents itself as ahistorical. So in exploring the contingency of our “Nine Values” poster we might invite students to consider Hank Nelson’s analysis of Paul Keating’s unsuccessful attempt, when prime minister, to shift the national identity myth from Gallipoli to Kokoda. The aim was to bring the symbol of nationhood into the Asia-Pacific region and uncouple it from interests external to Australia. Stage 6 students might be invited to explore how the past is valued in light of Nelson’s statement that: “In their public claims about the history that Australians should learn two successive prime ministers have confirmed the power that lies in perceptions of the past. The debate about what is remembered and what is celebrated is a debate about the future” (Nelson, 1997, p155).

Implementation

This poster is clearly part of a particular federal political agenda and as a largely instrumentalist harnessing of values education as a means of promoting social cohesion. The Report of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project (Curriculum Corporation September 2006) explores several other reasons to promote values education and outlines important elements for implementing the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools. Perhaps unsurprisingly it emphasises the need for a whole school approach, and for putting values at the core. Pleasingly they conclude that “[r]eaching agreement within the school community about the values that guide the school, and the language in which they are described, is a precursor to successfully embedding these values in the policies and practices of the school” (VEGPS, p6). Clearly successful schools in the project did not swallow our poster whole. Most important for my paper however is the following:
The Good Practice Schools Project experiences support the conclusion that effective values education involves the explicit articulation and explicit teaching of the values. This means values education is integrated with the ‘mainstream’ curriculum rather than being seen as an ‘add on’ or something separate to teach. (VEGPS, p6-7)

The report goes on to outline middle school integration and a variety of other approaches to bring this about. However my experience has been that the power and prestige of the disciplinary subject, particularly at the stage 6 level, is such that values education in Australia, by being everywhere, as the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools prescribes (Department of Education Employment and Training, 2005, p. 2), may end up being artificially tacked on.

For example the word “values” appears nowhere in any of the NSW HSC mathematics syllabuses, except in the context, say, of “absolute value” or “values of X”. Which is not to say mathematics teachers don’t engage in values education. But in a busy mathematics syllabus, is there really time to consider the implications of the fact that, since Galileo, mathematics has been the language of science? What about problems of incommensurability in public discourse? To a logging company this rainforest is worth $1 billion a year in wood chips, to an environmentalist it is a holy place. Does the environmentalist really have to translate what she means into countable tonnes of carbon emissions and dollar value sustainable eco-tourism to make sense?

There are other examples which I’ll pass over in this brief presentation. However even in the many subjects with well articulated values outcomes, these are certainly still constrained by disciplinary boundaries that, while important for subject rigour, represent what Uhrmarcher (1997) has called a “curriculum shadow”. Subject disciplines are disciplines because they disdain that which is outside their traditional boundaries. Yet values and ethics questions do not necessarily follow the same boundaries. Indeed if we learn anything from the dismal science it is that part of understanding value is understanding opportunity cost: we need to compare values across a wide range of areas. So the question remains what is needed to promote vigorous values education at the core of a stage six program? Venville et al. (2002), in their investigation of curriculum integration, have described the power and structure of subject disciplines as “part of the grammar of schooling” (p. 53). So how are we to conjugate afresh?

International Baccalaureate Diploma Program

In fact my IB experience leads me to a more cartographic conception of how to address what I see as a limit to meaningful values education across the KLAS. Before I introduce you to the structure of the IB however, I first need to state clearly what I’m not doing. Whatever its origins in a liberal humanist philosophy of social justice (Walker, 2004) the IB is a curriculum explicitly for pre-undergraduate students, roughly the top quarter of students with regard to academic achievement. Furthermore the IB has been seen to be, and indeed A view from somewhere
has been, a curriculum of privilege in Australia, as Kay Whitehead (2005) has shown. And Paul Paris (2003), in distinguishing between international education as process rather than product identifies the IB as an instrument of global capitalism. It is not part of my intention to defend it from these charges, nor its courses, some of which are excellent, but none of which are “for everyone”. I simply hope to offer its cartographic representation of curriculum for consideration in the hope of promoting dialogue. I also think that, despite the subject’s rather daunting name, it is possible to conceptualise a TOK syllabus that bridges VET and pre-undergraduate distinctions to suit Australian schools. Indeed this is already happening: Hill (2006) has pointed to “two pilot projects with national authorities in Finland and Quebec to explore the…. development of a vocational theory of knowledge course which emphasises the inter-relatedness of learning” (p. 103).

So what is the IB Diploma Program hexagon? It represents the need for all students to take six subjects, one from each of the groups or areas of study. Three of these subjects must be taken at Higher Level. (Before you get hugely excited that it is mandatory to study a subject in the arts, the null curriculum strikes again: this can be substituted with second subject from any of the other areas. We see again how values are unassailably implicated in all curricula.) This leaves a space which is the main interest for this paper. In the central mandatory core there lie three components: Creativity Action Service, Theory of Knowledge and the Extended Essay. I intend to talk a little about what the first two of these might offer Australian school curricula. The third, Extended Essay, I will leave aside: it is obviously specific to a pre-undergraduate program, although I note in passing that reconceptualised more broadly as a “project in the world” it might well be of interest.

**Creativity Action Service (CAS)**

It makes good sense to me that the mandatory Creativity Action Service (CAS) component is at the centre of the IB curriculum. For me the extent to which we are creative, active and serving is the extent to which we are fully human. The component requires students to log 50 hours of creative work, 50
hours of active work such as sport and 50 hours of community service over 
the two years of their diploma. I have not coordinated CAS but have been 
involved in some productive and powerfully transformative projects and 
activities. There is not time today to explore this extremely under-researched 
subject beyond saying that it could clearly offer a fruitful space for service 
learning and bringing values education to the centre of what schools do. I 
would add that there are real challenges with implementing such a program 
and that I believe it is currently under utilised in the IB, without the explicit 
connections to other subjects that I think would make it come alive 
intellectually as an arena for praxis, for student action in the world.

Theory of Knowledge (TOK)

I have certainly used student experience in CAS as a resource when I have 
taught the Theory of Knowledge course, in international schools in Muscat, 
Oman and Tamil Nadu, India. There is limited literature on TOK and on the 
whole it is poorly (or certainly diversely) theorised. In a sentence, the 
conceptions of TOK in what literature there exists are, variously, that it is: a 
basis for achieving Habermas’s ideal speech situation through normative 
universalism (de Moraes, 1998); a model for curriculum reform in Singapore 
which will enable students to “implement and market profitable products and 
services in a globalized economy” (Koh, 2002, p. 255); a possible means for 
balancing academic study with flights of mysticism and the imagination (Cole, 
2005); a media awareness and critical resistance subject (McKenzie, 2006); a 
curricular experiment in fostering critical thinking which fails because of its 
conflict with physical science education (Zemplén, 2007) and, last but not 
least, in a cultural heritage model, as a way to join “the long, ongoing 
conversation of humanity” (Michael Oakeshott, cited in Alchin, 2006, p. 1). I 
mention in passing that Singapore, in good corporate state form, has 
developed a TOK like subject to promote critical thinking apparently in order to 
promote product and industry innovation.
In my view TOK essentially encourages students to ask themselves one question: what do I mean when I say, “I know”? TOK as subject lies centre stage in the IB Diploma curriculum, and at the centre of TOK syllabus itself is the student as knower, or one of a group of knowers. If we look at the diagram of the syllabus closely we see that it requires students to compare and contrast ways of knowing within and across various areas of knowledge. The documentation in the syllabus stipulates that the areas here are not to be seen as exclusive: they follow the groups in the IB hexagon but students are invited to add those areas which are important to them, such as cooking, bushwalking and so on. Nor are the ways of knowing limited to these four and students in the past have suggested global vs local ways of knowing, authority as a way of knowing, and so on.

So what might reconceptualising this space contribute to values education in Australia? On a theoretical level I conceive it as a curriculum studies space with regard to a student’s own currere or running of the course. In making such a suggestion I am drawing on the scholarship of curriculum as autobiographical text by Madeline Grumet and William Pinar (1978). The term currere comes from Latin and is the infinitive form from the root for curriculum. The main benefit from conceptualising TOK in this way is that, to quote Grumet (1976), “by bringing the structures of experience to awareness one enhances the ability to direct the process of one’s own development (p115). The traditional concern of curriculum studies is: “what knowledge is of most worth”. TOK invites students to ask just such questions about themselves and their experiences of the school curriculum. This enables students to value their learning both in and out of school, and to find out what
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others value in their lives or in other subjects. Grumet emphasises that “structures of the school and the school subjects are understood as distinct from the student, but linked to his lived experience”. As a result, there is a healthy distancing of the student from the school, enabling students to explore how particular ways of knowing or areas of knowledge constitute a view from somewhere, rather than a timeless, eternal view from nowhere.

On a practical level, in TOK, intellectually high quality interrogation of values is never “outside the remit” of the subject. Indeed it also legitimates values learning in the KLAs: as an articulating hub within the whole curriculum TOK fits in to all the other subjects which in turn are encouraged to foster subject specific TOK material. Subject teachers can engage students in their own often passionate interest in values and knowledge issues without fear that they are “off task” or transgressing discipline boundaries. Given the openness of the syllabus teacher and students can respond to local or urgent issues quite flexibly. It might be hard for many other subjects to justify a fieldtrip to an abattoir, for example. Or to discuss whether it is ethical to buy Nike running shoes. If, among other aims, education does have particular instrumental aims like maintaining and reinvigorating democracy (as for example John Dewey envisioned), then it has to promote responsible citizenship, prevent indoctrination, and foster critical thinking. TOK allows students to compare how, say, Nine Values for Australian Schooling constructs national citizenship and how, say, environmental studies might promote a rather more global sense of citizenship.

Similarly, although I’m a staunch secularist still recovering from the unveiling of the federal government’s National Chaplaincy Program I recognise the ways in which secular curricula in a multicultural society leave little or no space for spiritual values, at least in part because of their often close connection with religious values. That I think is unfortunate. Here again however, Theory of Knowledge provides a safe place to explore spiritual and religious knowledge, beliefs and values. And getting all those chaplains in to give a guest lesson might give them some good work to do.

**Conclusion**

I hope this brief sketch of how TOK works within the IB Diploma has clarified how what it enables in values education. I don’t know if it can profitably be brought into an Australian context like the NSW HSC. However I do think it offers an integrated curriculum that doesn’t collapse disciplinary boundaries, perhaps making it a more politically palatable mode of curriculum reconceptualisation, thinking back to Bruce Wilson’s keynote. What it does do is provide a view from somewhere for students to consider their relationship to their own curriculum, their *currere*. And that surely is bringing curriculum centre stage.

A view from somewhere
References


