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History Teaching and the Values Agenda

Thesis submitted by

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in October 2009

in fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy
at James Cook University.

Declaration on Sources

I declare that this is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

Kelsey Halbert

Date

Statement on the Contribution of Others

I would like to acknowledge the intellectual support of both of my supervisors Associate Professor Melissa Vick and Dr Leanne Dalley-Trim who provided ongoing contributions to my research design, proposal writing, data analysis and also editorial assistance with my thesis.

I have received financial assistance from the School of Education in the form of a stipend which has covered my resources for data collection and printing.

I have not sought or received any other contributions.

Kelsey Halbert

Date

Declaration on Ethics

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Human* (1999), the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (1997), the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics. Standard Practices and Guidelines* (2001), and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Ethics Review Committee (approval number H2382).

Kelsey Halbert

Date

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Abstract

Citizenship education policy in Australia has come sharply into focus over the last two decades. This is consistent with trends in Europe and the United States. In each case, these developments can be seen as a response to perceived social decline and community fragmentation. In Australia, recent values education policy can be seen as the latest expression of citizenship education. This policy was launched in 2005 with the distribution of the *National Framework for Values in Australian Schools* (DEST, 2005). This document prescribed nine ‘values’ including principles such as Honesty, Integrity and Respect. The framework has been followed with a series of resources for schools and exemplary case studies of “good practice” values education. While there is agreement that values are implicit in all facets of teaching and learning, the policy directives, public debate and comparative research projects which surrounded the ‘nine values’ largely marginalised everyday classroom practice.

This thesis discusses the ways in which teachers and students in three distinctive Queensland Senior Modern History classrooms construct their role and the role of values. These teachers’ and students’ experiences allow discussion of values education in the concrete context of the classroom and subject, rather than abstracted as merely political or moral ideals. Foucauldian concepts of subjectivity and power are used to analyse policy documents, teacher and student interviews and observational data. The focus of analysis is on the ways in which these teachers and students articulate and enact ‘personal’, professional and policy values in conjunction with their interpretation of the nature and purpose of History teaching.

This analysis revealed consistencies in the way teachers articulated their own professional values and aims with a strong orientation towards understanding democratic processes and advocating social justice. Also significant were the tensions between these orientations and the values discourse of the schools and national policy. Comparison between student and teacher experiences also revealed varied interpretations of the purpose and values of the History classroom.

While the data is contextual and focuses on the individual schools, teachers and students, there are wider implications for citizenship education policy and understanding the local, national and global demands on specific subjects. Analysis reveals, within these classrooms, principles of historical inquiry and social constructivism are guiding a critical, contextualised and social process of values engagement. Furthermore, to have any impact, values education must be contextualised. Policy would need to be directed at meaningful opportunities and resources within subjects like History. In order to develop opportunities and resources, the teacher is the most powerful agent in directing and empowering students to refine and enact their values. The ongoing debate about the role and ‘space’ for History in the curriculum may be reconciled, in part, by illuminating these opportunities for developing ethical citizens.

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