

Outdoor and Environmental Studies: Yet more challenges to its place in the curriculum

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Abstract

Outdoor and Environmental Studies has faced a challenging journey to reach its current place in the VCE curriculum, but it has been able to sustain its presence and (slightly) increase participation rates since the shift from *Outdoor Education*, nevertheless.

As the study moves towards yet another accreditation, what will be the outcome of the existence of the other environment related subjects in VCE, and what will be the influence of the agenda from the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development?

A short history

- 1975 Agricultural and Environmental Science
 - 1977 Environmental Science
 - *1982 Outdoor Education*
 - 1991 Environmental Studies
 - 2001 Environmental Science
- Outdoor and Environmental Studies
- 2005 revised study designs implemented

1997 Review of the Victorian Certificate of Education

The Board of Studies' recommendations following the 1997 Review were that there should be:

- discontinuation of *Environmental Studies* and *Science*.
- strengthening of the environmental education components of other studies, specifically *Geography*, *Biology*, *Chemistry* and *Economics*.
- a new science study, *Environmental Science*, in the Science Key Learning Area.
- rewriting of the study Outdoor Education as a new subject '*Study of the Environment and Outdoor Education*' in the Health and Physical Education Key Learning Area.

Comparing the units

UNIT	ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES (1994)	OUTDOOR EDUCATION (1994)	OUTDOOR AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES (2001)	OUTDOOR AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES (2001)
1	The study of environments	Discovering the outdoors	Understanding nature	Understanding outdoor experiences
2	Environmental impact and conservation in Victoria	Exploring the outdoors	Environmental impacts	Environmental impacts
3	Conservation and development in Australia	Adventure in the outdoors	Relationships with outdoor environments	Relationships with natural environments
4	The global challenge	People and the outdoors	The future of natural environments	The future of human-nature interactions

VCE Enrolment trends

SUBJECT	1995	2000	2001	2003	2005	2006
Biology	10918	10546	10668	11579	11648	11465
Chemistry	8503	8090	8166	8712	9083	9125
Physics	7234	7534	7697	7871	6978	6812
Psychology	9428	12272	13418	14781	14439	14924
Science	253	59				
Environmental Studies	826	662				
Environmental Science			530	360	319	301
Outdoor Education	1531	2148				
Outdoor & Environmental Studies			2263	2492	2390	2176

Ongoing Issues

- Environment as a dimension in the curriculum or separate subject(s)?
- Overlap in content between subjects:
 - Outdoor and Environmental Studies
 - Environmental Science
 - Geography
 - Biology
- “A VCE study will not be developed or approved unless it can be demonstrated that it has maintained an enrolment of 1 per cent of the year cohort, or in the case of a new study will do so within three years of its implementation”

Outdoor education

- First accredited as senior secondary subject in 1982
- By 1993 over 5000 students at Years 11/12

VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies Enrolment Trends

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Unit 1	3489	3033	3070	2923	2998	3247
Unit 3	2263	2287	2492	2112	2390	2176
TOTAL	5752	5320	5562	5035	5388	5423

Environmental education

- 1990 Ministerial Policy on Environmental Education
- 1998 Investing in the Future: Environmental Education for Victorian Schools
- 2002 “leaf symbol” in Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF II)
- 2007 “sustainability” as a cross-curricular perspective in VELS

Mixed messages??

- “Outdoor education: environmental education reinvented, or environmental education reconceived?” (Brookes, 1989)
- Environmental educators see outdoor education as education *in* the environment with very little education *for* or *about* the environment
- Significant life experience research argues for the importance of outdoor experiences in developing people’s relationship with nature

Different orientations?

- Outdoor education is strong on personal and social development and has an experiential focus
- Environmental education is concerned with awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills and participation related to the resolution of environmental problems

Goals and objectives of environmental education

1. The goals of environmental education are:
 - (a) to foster clear awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas;
 - (b) to provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment;
 - (c) to create new patterns of behaviour of individuals, groups and society as a whole towards the environment.

The categories of environmental education objectives:

Awareness: to help social groups and individuals acquire an awareness of and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems.

Knowledge: to help social groups and individuals gain a variety of experience in, and acquire a basic understanding of, the environment and its associate problems.

Attitudes: to help social groups and individuals acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment, and the motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection.

Skills: to help social groups and individuals acquire the skills for identifying and solving environmental problems.

Participation: to provide social groups and individuals with an opportunity to be actively involved at all levels in working toward resolution of environmental problems.

Environmental education and outdoor education

Outdoor education is inextricably linked with environmental education through providing students with a unique opportunity for:

- direct interaction with natural environments for developing understanding of those environments and the relationships of humans with them
- students to interact with each other, solve problems and make decisions in a context that has immediate, tangible consequences for themselves, others and the environment
- developing positive beliefs, attitudes and understandings of the world and our place in it
- developing knowledge and skills that may lead to a healthier, more fulfilling lifestyle.

Tensions for VCE OES

- Outdoor education distinguishes itself by its separation from schools and its experiential orientation
- Yet environmental studies are generally school and text based.
- In order to achieve its aims, Outdoor and Environmental Studies students require “well-crafted outdoor experiences [to] help participants understand that they have an inherited worldview and [to] become aware of alternatives” (Brookes, 1994, p.39).
- But, as Brookes (c.1999) queried, who will teach this subject?

Defining OES as a subject

Comparing the aims of

- Outdoor Education (1994)
- Outdoor and Environmental Studies (2000)
- Outdoor and Environmental Studies (2005)

Outdoor Education (1994)

This study is designed to enable students to develop:

- an understanding and appreciation of the relationship between people and the outdoors;
- physical, sensory and intellectual abilities for safe and worthwhile exploration and protection of the outdoors;
- knowledge of outdoor environments and their effect on outdoor activities; and
- an understanding of the direct and indirect influence of biological, social and cultural factors on outdoor activities and environments.

Outdoor and Environmental Studies (2000)

This study is designed to enable students to:

- develop an appreciation and understanding of outdoor environments;
- develop an understanding of basic ecological principles;
- develop an understanding of the diversity of views of nature and that outdoor environments may or may not be synonymous with nature;
- develop an understanding of human impact on and relationships with nature;
- develop skills and knowledge related to practical experiences of outdoor environments;
- acquire practical skills for safe outdoor travel and living;
- acquire skills for minimum impact travel, living and investigation of outdoor environments;
- develop skills of observation, data collection, analysis, synthesis and evaluation fundamental to outdoor environmental inquiry;
- develop an understanding of the role of the outdoor environment in contributing to Australian culture;
- develop respect for the outdoor environment and a concern for its conservation;
- develop an understanding of the strategies used to protect, conserve and manage the outdoor environment.

Outdoor and Environmental Studies (2005)

This study is designed to enable students to:

- develop experience-based relationships with, and knowledge of, natural environments;
- develop an understanding of the ecological, historical, economic and social factors which have had an impact on and will influence natural environments over time;
- develop skills and knowledge that promote safe, sustainable interaction with natural environments;
- develop skills and knowledge to live comfortably for short durations in natural environments;
- identify and analyse the strategies and rationales used to protect, conserve and manage natural environments in a sustainable manner;
- understand the implications of trends towards sustainable environmental relationships;
- critically analyse interactions with natural environments in shaping Australian cultural practices.

John Geary's story 1

Comparing the two study designs:

- In *Outdoor Education*, “the obvious learning for students could be the outdoor skills... with some environmental knowledge and impacts thrown in”, and a key element was “the power of experiential learning”, kids forming “their own sense of inquiry” and “personal interaction with the environment”
- However, with *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* “you need to focus on nature, human relationships with nature and environmental outcomes... the outdoor skills are the incidental learning from practical trips” and “you have to complete much of the theoretical work before you go into the field”

John's story 2

- John has been able to maintain his old *Outdoor Education* trips but he has changed their style and focus which has made them interesting and effective.
- He acknowledges that some teachers' bias towards outdoor skills has made them frustrated in the new course "because they did not have the teaching tools, resources or perhaps the desire to challenge themselves or change their pedagogical practices"
- John concludes that "it would be a step in the wrong direction if we were to go back to what could be seen as the old activity-focused curriculum of VCE *Outdoor Education*... it was time for a change"
...as told to Tony Keeble (2003)
- *Would this story be different with the revised study design?*

Challenges for OES

- Enrolments seem to have stabilised around 5000-5500 students
- Number of providers has reduced from 153 to 139
- More inquiries into overlaps between VCE studies
- Interacting with “sustainability” (and Education for Sustainable Development)

Education for Sustainable Development 1

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002, previous notions of environmental education (EE) were *broadened to encompass social justice and the fight against poverty as key principles of development that is sustainable. The human and social aspects of sustainable development meant that solidarity, equity, partnership and cooperation were as crucial as scientific approaches to environmental protection*

(UNESCO, 2004)

Education for Sustainable Development 2

- At a simplistic level, environmental education and education for sustainable development are concerned with achieving the same ends: enabling learners to question unsustainable practices and participate in changing these practices.
- The difference is in the scope covered in achieving this goal, and in the focus.

Education for Sustainable Development 3

- Environmental education has traditionally been problem focused: its goals and objectives have usually referred to the environment and its associated problems, and resolving these.
- Education for sustainable development encompasses environmental education, setting it in the broader context of socio-cultural factors and the socio-political issues of equity, poverty, democracy and quality of life as well as a development perspective on social change and evolving circumstances.
- A major difference is that ESD is envisaged as “ultimately about education and capacity building and only secondly about environmental problem-solving” (Fien, 2001).

Education for Sustainable Development 4

- Implementing ESD in schools involves approaches to teaching and learning that integrate goals for conservation, social justice, appropriate development and democracy into a vision and a mission of personal and social change.
- It also involves developing the kinds of civic virtues and skills that can empower all citizens and, through them, our social institutions, to play leading roles in the transition to a sustainable future.
- ESD encompasses a vision for global society that is not only ecologically sustainable but also one that is socially and economically sustainable.

Should OES engage with ESD?

Socio-cultural perspectives

- Human Rights
- Peace and human security
- Gender Equality
- Cultural Diversity and intercultural understanding
- Health
- HIV/AIDS
- Governance

Environmental perspectives

- Natural resources
- Climate change
- Rural transformation
- Sustainable urbanisation
- Disaster prevention and mitigation

Economic perspectives

- Poverty reduction
- Corporate responsibility and accountability
- Market economy

Current potential engagements

- From the socio-cultural perspectives, gender equality issues are covered in Unit 1, intercultural understanding pervades the units, as does health, and governance is considered in Units 2 and 4.
- Of the economic perspectives, both market economy and corporate responsibility and accountability are touched on in Units 2, 3 and 4.
- And many of the environmental perspectives are potentially covered in each Unit.

Where to from here?

- Grow VCE enrolments?
- Develop the sustainability cross curricular perspective through VELs?
- Advocate and implement more ESD in schools?
- Continue to work on relationships with other VCE subjects that also have an environmental dimension?

Discussion Questions

- How do we get more students studying Outdoor and Environmental Studies?
- What are the significant learnings from VCE OES that are valued by teachers and students?
- What would you like to see in VCE OES that is not there now?
- How can we get “sustainability” more broadly across VCE?
- How do you think a subject on “Sustainability Science” would be received?
- Would VCE OES students be interested in such a subject?