

After Secondary

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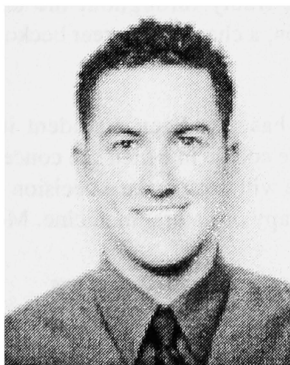


Just how successful have we been in our roles as environmental educators? With the huge groundswell of interest our society has in the environmental field it is of interest to track the progress of five students that have moved on from our school. As potential movers and shapers in future years these students have been chosen to talk about their ideas, experiences and concerns about environmental education.

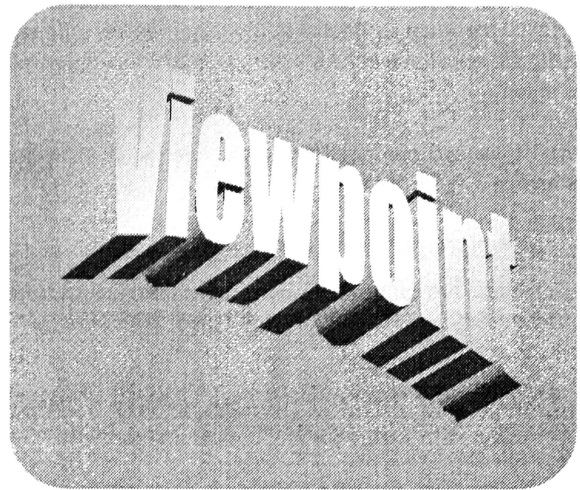
The background to Environmental Education at St. Joseph's College, Geelong, lies in the ever-changing curriculum of the school. During the early 1990s there was a major upheaval in choices. Chinese replaced French, Geography and English Literature disappeared and Environmental Studies was trialed as one of the new VCE subjects. Our Principal, Mr. Peter Cannon, was always receptive to new ideas.

All major assignments were location-based and presented some relevant local issues. Included were Coode Island, the chemical storage facility and its possible relocation, the scallop industry of Port Phillip Bay, the You Yangs and the Striped Legless Lizard.

Seamus



The clientele varied as much as the scope of the course. Regular attendees were the academic refugees who found this subject only because the timetable could not place them anywhere else, along with a smattering of average and above-average students. The students chosen for this article shared a passion for this subject and to some degree have pursued this



field in their post-secondary life.

What was good about Environmental Education at St. Joseph's was the first response to three questions asked. The replies varied in length and the key points have been recorded:

'a "hands on" experience...'

'We were given a land plot in the You Yangs and were given the challenge to find a way to eradicate the boneseed problem'.

'...gave me my first taste of what it was like to enjoy school and inspired me to learn and know as much as possible so that I might have the potential to make a positive impact in this area'.

'The opportunity to learn about the earth on certain topics'.

'Going and doing things...being given problems and working towards solutions'.

'Environmental Education showed me the issues that are going on in the world that no other subject offered. Yet it is so important to everyday life to know the simple things that I based my assignments on, but is overlooked I thought through the school system'.

'The ability to interact with tangible projects'.

Louise



For this, it would be appropriate to say that EE can have a deep and lasting influence on our students. Just how far this

influence goes is beyond my imagination. It has always perplexed me when a student vividly recalls an assignment or activity from years ago. This must mean that an engagement was made.

What EE lacked produced some expected and unexpected comments. The truth sometimes hurts!

‘The subject was too narrow in what it offered’.

‘...should have introduced and emphasised the role of community and volunteer involvement with environmental issues’.

‘I found that the subject itself wasn’t enough to make me and other people aware of what’s going on in the world’.

‘A more substantial investigation into environmental law (at a state level) including the interaction between industry and the EPA’s requirements and policies on pollution, i.e. SEPP’s. Also a general understanding of the EPA, its functions, its dysfunctions, its role in regulating state environmental protection policies’.

‘... an examination of the major problems of the earth and the government’s lack of political will’.

Tamara



The scope of these responses indicates just how broadly EE is perceived. It would be close to an impossibility to cater for everything mentioned yet this could be a challenge for our curriculum developers to consider.

The final question was what direction EE should take now.

‘...if it continues along that path of up-to-date issues as well as past problems in the environment it will strive to higher levels’.

‘Pretty happy with the direction it was taking’

‘Environmental education should be an essential part of the early curriculum so that all people can have some understanding of local environmental issues, their power, their positive and negative impacts and also wider and global environmental issues that have rebounding effects to us all.’

‘...health concerns of the environment. Solutions to remedy this. The strength of multi-national companies

and the influence of governments’.

‘Concentrate on the issues that are now happening’

These responses suggest that contemporary concerns are addressed adequately.

The students that made up this group are people that in some way or another have kept in contact. A short profile of each follows.

Edwin Bradford finished secondary school in 1994. He studied ecotourism at Charles Sturt University for eight months before leaving. He found jobs in the hospitality industry in both Victoria and Queensland. During this time Edwin actively pursued his hobby of diving and snorkelling. In 1999 he ventured to Whistler, British Columbia, to take up a position as a tour guide. Edwin is now back in Australia, working for an audiovisual media business on Hamilton Island and to relax he simply goes cruising and diving.

Louise Beames is currently finishing her Bachelor of Science Degree at Melbourne University with major studies in wildlife biology. She deferred for six months to work for the Green Corps, which centred its work on koala relocation. Her plan is to do honours but she would like to gain relevant employment experience before undertaking further study.

Seamus Butcher completed a Bachelor of Engineering (Environmental Engineering) at RMIT in 1999. He applied for fifty jobs before he found work with AWN (Air, Water and Noise) Consultants. In Seamus’ own words, ‘although only in my second year with AWN Consultants, I have had the opportunity to experience and work with most areas, some more than others. AWN provides an even balance between on-site, office and laboratory work, which in turn helps provides an interesting work environment. The variation of work, including consultation with clients, project management, report writing, analytical chemistry and expertise in laboratory and environmental monitoring equipment, will hopefully allow me to move freely throughout the environmental industry, if and when, a change of career beckons. For now I enjoy what I do’

Tamara Kichakov has also been a student in Melbourne University’s Science course in which she concentrated on an anatomy major. She will soon make a decision as to whether to enrol in myotherapy or natural medicine. More study is a certainty for her.

Edwin



Finally, Erskin Leafhim did not like the way society was run and he wandered Australia picking up work as a bartender and general labourer. For the last two to three years he has been unemployed but is not on the dole. He has been involved in blockades in East Gippsland, South East New South Wales and now The Otways in Victoria. Erskin will often spend 18 hours a day devoting himself to environmental activism, especially in relation to forestry.

These are just five students from a pool of around 300. Environmental Studies/Science is one of many subjects offered in the Victorian Certificate of Education. It was only a few years ago that economic rationalisation almost saw it removed. Fortunately, public pressure won out and I am certain it was the right decision for Victorian education. The success of EE at St. Joseph's College could be measured in many ways—as admissions to tertiary courses, ENTER scores, or community activities, but for me it is the passion for environmental issues that a student possesses. Both Edwin and Erskin might never complete a university degree but they certainly have a profound connection with the environment. That is a defensible yardstick for Environmental Education. 🍌