Introduction

549 state school children from 13 different school along the eastern seaboard of the state of New South Wales were asked to list all the countries they knew, the countries they liked and why, and the countries they disliked and why. Results indicated that children retained a very Anglocentric view of the world despite many years of concerted efforts in Australian education systems to promote a more regional perspective. Their responses also indicated that they were strongly influenced by media representations of countries in the world and tended to stereotype places and people as a result of these. Many of these children obviously felt afraid of many parts of the world.

I Don’t Like It

War (Sean, 7 years)

The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty First Century (1999) noted that “when students leave school they should... have the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice, the same number do so only in superficial; ways and the capacity to make sense of their world, to think about how things got to be the way they are.” Young children’s lack of knowledge of the world severely impedes their “capacity to make sense” of it, and their early developed stereotypes and prejudices restrict the exercise of ‘judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice’. This study explores young children’s knowledge of the world.

The Review of Studies of Asia in Australian Schools (2000) noted that about “a quarter of schools do not teach about Asia at all, and at least the same number do so in only superficial ways” (p129). They came to this conclusion by examining documents, case studies of best practice, interviews with key stakeholders and a survey of schools. This current study, by examining children’s knowledge of countries, offers a different perspective on the success of attempts to address the issue of establishing Australia as part of the Asian region. In New South Wales the Department of Education and Training (2004) produced a statement about the teaching of values in NSW schools. They advocated core values for the community of integrity, excellence, respect, responsibility, cooperation, participation, care, fairness and democracy. These values are to be modelled, explicitly taught and discussed in the school and the community. It would seem that these values are very relevant to school children’s
view of the world and should provide a platform for discussion of world affairs. This study, by exploring young children's attitudes to countries of the world, provides some insights into NSW children's key values. The Commonwealth Government's updated New Agenda for Multicultural Australia (2004) espouses four principles underpinning multicultural policy in Australia: responsibilities for all, respect for each person, fairness for each person and benefits for all. This too could be applied to global understanding. How do our children respect others and demonstrate fairness? It can be seen that Australian curriculum designers are definitely aiming for a tolerant and open-minded society, a society 'at one' in its Asian region, and many curriculum initiatives aim for these objectives. So how is it going, how are we progressing, and what are some of the pitfalls for such programs? This study addresses issues associated with all themes providing a glimpse of children's knowledge and attitudes with emphasis on children's views in regional NSW.

How the study was undertaken

549 school children from 13 different schools along the eastern cost of NSW were asked to complete a survey. The schools included city schools and small town schools. They were from Sydney, Central Coast, Newcastle and The North Coast. They were from different socioeconomic areas (based on postcodes) and one school had a strongly multi-ethnic background. Schools were randomly selected on socio-economic status, city/country status, accessibility to researcher and willingness to participate. Permission was received by the Department of Education and Training and all schools were state schools. Parents and principals were approached for permission to undertake the study. Students were either in Stage 1 or Stage 3 in the NSW curriculum strands (aged 6/7 and 10/11 years). Students were asked:

- list all the countries they knew (they were prompted with: think about countries where sporting teams might come from, countries where you might like to go on holiday, countries you have seen on the television, countries you have learned about in school, countries where you may have a relative....)

  - write down the countries in the world that you like and why (students could choose up to six countries).

  - write down all the countries in the world that you don't like and why (students could choose up to six countries).

The details of the participants are below

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<th>Frequency</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lwr Grades</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Upper Gds</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Table 1: Participant numbers according to grade level.

<table>
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<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>269</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>549</td>
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Table 2: Participant numbers according to gender

This study mirrored the age profiles of the study of Yorkshire children by Weigand (1991) described below. Although Weigand did not explore the attitudes of the children he surveyed, he did survey the children's knowledge of the world and so the data from the two studies can be compared.

Results: Known Countries

When considering the known countries identified by both upper and lower grades, it can be seen that the best known country was the United States followed by the United Kingdom, China, Japan and New Zealand. It should be noted that half of the students knew Africa as a single entity and that only China, Japan, New Zealand, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea (countries from our part of the world) were mentioned in this group. The latter two were only known by a quarter of the students. The numbers were low considering that there were 549 respondents. Well known countries such as the UK and the USA were still unknown by about 100 students. Pakistan
was in the top 10 known countries but only known by 148 students. The result indicates a very spotted knowledge of the world by these students. With consistent curriculum guidelines it would be expected that some areas of the world be well known. For instance one of the units of work suggested for implementation in Stage 3 of Human Society and Its Environment in NSW is a study of the culture of Bali, yet Indonesia was known by only 160 students. Their world knowledge seems to represent ancestral family ties, sporting expertise and some current affair knowledge - not systematic study of particular countries or areas of the world or even thematic world knowledge.

There were slight differences between the lower and upper grades. There were more instances of incorrect knowledge of what constitutes national states by the lower grade children with Tasmania, Sydney and Queensland being seen as separate countries. As far as numbers of countries known, over half of the lower grade students knew one country only - the United States. Over half of the upper grade students knew 16 countries. It is disturbing that many upper grade/stage students still thought of Africa as one big country. Once again where are Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Cambodia and the Solomon Islands?

The schools were compared according to Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) weekly household income figures for the postcodes in the suburbs where they were located. The results are as shown. Two schools with 98 students were in areas where a large proportion of families had low weekly household incomes. Three schools with 135 pupils were in areas where families had higher weekly household incomes. The proportion of lower grade to upper grade students was approximately one to three for both. The results for students from these areas were compared.

For the lower socioeconomic area over half of the students knew only three countries whereas in the higher socioeconomic over half knew 13 countries. Additionally there appeared to be less inclination to incorrectly identify continents, states or cities as countries in the higher socioeconomic areas with proportionally less students from the higher socioeconomic schools listing Africa, Russia and Antarctica as countries. Although we constantly try to address socioeconomic disadvantage in our curriculum initiatives their is obviously less knowledge of the world in lower socioeconomic areas with huge implications for the teaching of global citizenship.

There was little difference between males and females in the number of known countries and generally the same countries were known. There was a slight tendency for the males to have a sporting perspective on the world with Brazil, Pakistan, Italy, India and Germany noted.

**Unusual Countries**

| Amazon | Brydies House | City |
| Dreamworld | Easterworld | Gold Coast |
| Harbour Bridge | Islam | Mecca |
| Opera House | paradise | Sea World |
| Sahara Desert town | Snow | the sea |
| United Nations | Waterworld |

These are just some of the more unusual countries listed by children. One can see that world views like these can cause difficulties for children when trying to interpret media portrayals. When students categorise 'town', 'Brydie’s house' and the USA all as countries their understanding of the wider world is of necessity very limited. What must they be thinking about when they constantly see video clips of carnage in war torn countries? How does this impact on children’s abilities to respect and care for those who come from different backgrounds than their own.

Australia is obviously well liked and undoubtedly would have scored even higher if students had been allowed to include it. In the survey instructions children were told not to include Australia because the research was about children’s views of the world outside Australia. However many still put it down and in the end these results were included, not to demonstrate problems of children not listening
to instructions, but illustrate the sense of proud citizenship of the majority of Australian children.

Overall the children identified with the English speaking countries of the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand. Learning of language of Japan and France helped children feel more warmly toward them and there was the pull to the food of Italy, China, France and to a lesser extent Japan. Australian children love their beaches (Fiji, Bali, Hawaii) and their sport (New Zealand, UK, Egypt, Brazil, India). Once again note the numbers. Not many countries were well liked and out of the 549 respondents there were many who did not answer or who were unsure of their answers.

There is very little difference between responses when examined from the gender perspective. The male seemed to have more definite views in that the most liked top three scored double the lesser ranked countries whereas females were less confident. Females liked France much more that males. Children were also asked why they liked the countries they selected.

Why do we like these places?

**Australia**
Because everyone is friendly and it is safe because terrorism people don’t come here and we have a fair government
Because my friends are there
I like Australia because I live in Australia and it is warm. There is nice clean water and great people
I like Australia because I was born here and also I feel like home
It is a free country and there is no war
It is my hometown and I have never left it
They are good at cricket and I like the animals

**United States**
All of my most liked actors come from America
All of the theme parks like Disneyland and Disney world
I have never been there but I have seen stuff on TV and it looks good. I think it is doing the right thing at the moment fighting for peace
The snow at Christmas, shopping in NY, my family, Disneyworld, Hollywood and great food
That’s where we get our movies and technology from and has nice food like MacDonald’s

**United Kingdom**
Almost everyone likes soccer
Australian people come from England
A lot of famous singers come from there
Because I would like to see the old castles
I like it because of the accent they speak and because sometimes it can snow there
France
Because they have a nice language and make good food. They have a lot of landmarks that you can see. I would like to go to France because of the landmarks, the old buildings and everyone tells me about how nice the ice cream is. It is a very beautiful place and they have yummy food. We love French at school and I love the language.

Japan
Because we are learning Japanese, I do Japanese and I want to try all the food and wear kimonos and stuff. I learn it and they have a lot of different celebrations. I think Japan would be good because most Japanese people are friendly. Japan is a good place to go to in winter because it snows. There are some great people there. Technology is very high quality and cheap. You can climb Mt Fuji. They make good cars and motorbikes.

China
Because you can learn how to speak a different language and you could learn how to make origami. I can see the Great Wall and can walk it. I like their food. That is where my ancestors were born. The long great wall is in China. The people are friendly and they have unusual dances and fantastic foods.

I want to see the Chinese gymnasts compete. I would love to see the pandas.

Italy
I like Italy because I have members of my family there and it has good food. Because they invented pizza and pasta, I like Italy because there are nice people there, the food is good and they speak a nice language. Pasta, pizza and the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

New Zealand
I went to New Zealand. I like how it is not such a big country and how the people speak like Australians. Also it is where my Mum comes from there. Australia always beats them in sport. It has big mountains to climb and go fishing. It's got beautiful scenery. There are great places to ski and everyone is friendly. Their rugby team does the HAIKA. They speak funny. They're good at cricket.

Children liked countries because they had relatives there, they liked the food, they enjoyed the Hollywood version of these places, they enjoyed the sporting prowess of the people, they enjoyed the geography and tourist sites. It is very much a tourist view of the world. It does not indicate strong linkages between Australians and the people of these countries. Only a few of these sample responses refer to actual connections with people or ideas from these countries.

Results: Countries Not Liked

Tasmania: Jungle and wild animals

Iraq, Afghanistan and the United States are the countries least well liked predominantly because they are associated with war and mayhem. A number of children noted the USA as both liked and disliked with the movieland, fun park focus being attractive to them and the fear of buildings falling on them and gun toting madmen bearing down on them being unattractive. Similarly Japan and China figured on both liked and disliked tables. Children enjoyed the exotic food and clothing and customs but were concerned about not
knowing the customs and language and feeling confused by the strangeness of it. Once again the numbers are not very high. Apart from the media influence of Iraq, Afghanistan and the USA many children obviously didn’t really know if they liked or disliked these countries and knew little about them.

There is very little difference between males and females in the countries they disliked. Males tended to like the USA more than females. There is not sufficient evidence to explain why but it could indicate a stronger feeling against violence with females than males. There is however, an overall similarity in countries chosen. It should be remembered that many children were unaware of many countries in the world and so did not have a lot to choose from. There are over 260 countries in the world and even in Europe there were many countries such as Ukraine and Czech Republic which were not well known.

Why don’t we like countries?

Iraq
Because it is hot and Saddam Hussein
Because of what they did to America. And it’s having a war over there right now and kids could have guns or anything
Because they started the war and could take over the world by the cruel man Saddam Hussein - the man of pain
Because there a war going on there and I wouldn’t like to get killed
I don’t like Iraq because they are selfish and they have a really mean leader
I hate it because there is a bad man trying to kill every man in Australia
I hate it because they’re always causing trouble and they’re idiots
I don’t like Iraq because it doesn’t have special places to visit. I don’t like Saddam Hussein. Most terrorists are from Iraq.
It is like a rubbish dump
Its war torn. People are mean. There’s not much money
It is dirty and a war is going on and they torture people there
There are many horrible things there like they always want to fight and have wars
There aren’t many trees and it is mostly dirt
The people are all crazy

Afghanistan
Because Osama Bin Laden lives there and he also wants to bomb America
It is poor. It thrives with terrorists. Its houses don’t look good
I don’t like the name and there is a war going on over there
They don’t have much water and food and could die of hunger and dehydration
They killed lots of people in America. They are mean
Bad people live there

United States
America is not a peaceful place to have a holiday because they always have to get involved in War and right now they are having a war with Bali and they started first.
I don’t like George Bush because they went and bombed Iraq
Because John Howard and George Bush are from there and they are hurting little kids and people and other countries
I hate the Americans language. It is too hard to understand
I really don’t like the way they are hurting innocent people and terrorism Iraq
They are attacking Iraq for no reason at all. They say they have nuclear missiles sitting there - well so do they?
The country is weird. Guns are not illegal. There is a town where it is compulsory to have a gun
It is too busy and I don’t want be in another building collapse
They have tornadoes. It is too big of a country

China
Animal cruelty eg. locking up poor but cute bears
I don’t like it because you are only allowed to have one child and if you have more that none they take your child away and put it in an orphanage
Food, crowded, unusual religions
It is over populated and I would not know what I am doing
They cut people’s heads off and play soccer with their heads
Too many people/pollution/SARS disease
They speak weird
They always do bombs
They eat dogs
Usually the emperor’s evil

Japan
I don’t like Japanese people because they wear different clothes
It is a crowded country with a lot of noise and population
Nearly all people are brown and I don’t like them
People say they eat the poor Easter bunny
I don’t like Japan because I have tried sushi and I
hate it so if I go to Japan there will be nothing to eat except sushi
I could get lost in the crowds
They bombed Darwin and were the bad guys in WW2
They speak funny

Africa
I would be really hot and bugs and pests from all the jungles
It is not healthy. There is not much drinking water
that it is not poisonous
It has too many wild animals
I don’t like Africans because there are a lot of Africans.
Too many people live there. It is very hot and lots of
wild animals live there.
There are too many wild animals that are out in the wild.
It is very hot and there are poor kids.

Bali
Because of the Bali bombings and I would not like to visit it.
Because of the tidal wave
Because of the bombing
I wouldn’t want to be killed like many other people.
People have been killed there and there are lots of
soldiers and police.

Pakistan
For the same reason I don’t like Afghanistan- They like
to kill and they always start wars and fights
BAD LAWS
Lots of bombs and guns. Too many soldiers
They are cruel with animals and they bombed America twice
They are helping Afghanistan and Iraq at war.

What the ‘dislike’ responses indicated strongly was that when children make up their mind about a particular country it is strongly based on media representations and Hollywood versions. Reporting of minor events such as an act of cruelty to an animal can have a huge impact on a child’s perceptions of a country.

Where does our world view come from?
The Australian children we surveyed tended to have an Anglocentric view of the world and for many children their knowledge was not all that extensive. The individual nations of Africa, most of South America, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Pacific Ocean nations, in fact virtually the entire southern hemisphere was almost unknown to the students. Even countries with which Australia has had long term connections such as Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and Timor were not as well known as many European countries. The students sampled did not reflect the Anglo-Australian section of the population with only the Sydney schools reflecting the diverse ethnic composition of the Australian population and this obviously influenced this European focus. However, after at least 40 years of emphasis on multicultural education in Australian schools it could be expected that a wider understanding of the world would have been evident.

The question of what should be in our school curriculum has varied according to the overall Australian population’s world view and as a British outpost for over 150 years a very strong link was established with the English and Irish curriculum (Barcan, 1980). The links with Britain were established as the founder of the convict colony in the late 18th century and more recently strong American ties have been established in the 20th century as a function of joint Pacific Ocean security. The huge influx of immigrants after World War 2 added another dimension to the constant Australian struggle to identify which part of the world we belonged to and subsequently which parts of the world we should emphasise in the curriculum (White, 1992). However for many years now Australian national governments have emphasised the need to enhance the image of Australia as a regional partner – a part of the Asian region - albeit with European ties. The Auchmuty Report of 1970 suggested that primary schools should be developing some understanding and sympathy toward Asia and that some core studies in secondary schools should be about Asia. The Commonwealth government provided up to $1.5 million from 1972-1977 to develop Asian languages in schools and companies like Qantas supported the development of Asian cultural kits for schools. In New South Wales a new subject called Asian Social Studies was developed in 1967 for junior secondary students. Since this period there have been constant calls to increase Asian understanding with encouragement of the teaching of Asian lan-
guages in primary and secondary school and cultural material such as Access Asia developed by the Curriculum Corporation. This material has been developed as part of the strategies developed by the Asia Education Foundation (AEF) established in 1992 as a national organisation to promote the studies of Asia in Australian schools. Unfortunately this study upholds the findings of the NASLAS report of 2002, that we still have a long way to go in this area.

However, lack of near neighbour familiarity is apparently not solely an Australian failing. One aspect of this study is similar to a study conducted by Patrick Weigand in Yorkshire over ten years ago and the impetus for the current study was provided by Weigand’s research. Weigand (1991) asked 222 children in year three and year six from schools in different socioeconomic areas to write down the names of all the foreign counties they knew. ‘The children in year 3 were generally able to name five or six countries but frequently showed imperfect classification. ‘The constituent parts of the United Kingdom were given as foreign countries at this age’ p144. On average year six children were able to name 15 countries. By the age of 11 most of the children knew much of western Europe along with the larger countries of the Middle East, America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, China and Japan. Boys knew some of the African soccer countries such as Egypt, South Africa and Zimbabwe but overall the various countries of Africa were unknown. Likewise few of the countries of South East Asia, South or Central America, and Eastern Europe were known. Weigand found differences according to socioeconomic status with children from wealthier families knowing more of the world than families from lower socioeconomic areas. He concluded that the limited global awareness was cause for concern for primary teachers as was the variability across schools, and argued that teachers should assess children’s baseline knowledge of the world when organising work for them; “some places might be selected because the children already share some common knowledge about them, others because they are entirely unknown” (p148).

The current UK primary syllabus in Geography addresses place knowledge by specifically arguing for certain areas of the world to be studied. The geography Association in the UK has developed many resources for teachers to do just that. There is still a degree of uncertainty in Australian curriculum as to what we should study and how we should study it.

The results for our NSW children were similar to the results attained in Yorkshire, England and did not reflect the much touted Asian focus in Australian school curriculum. Children’s perception of countries were based on similar categories reported by Weigand; that is animals, physical environment, sporting teams (undoubtedly a big factor in sports crazed Australia), sightseeing, shopping, entertainment, perceptions of people (‘they have brown skin’, ‘they are nice people’). Countries were also judged on media perceptions and it was obvious that the reporting of wars and terrorism was making a huge impact on children’s assumptions about certain places in the world. It was disturbing that these assumptions went beyond the war torn and environmentally destitute aspects of the country to assumptions about the personalities and motives of the people who lived there (‘they are cruel’, ‘people are mean’, ‘they are idiots’). There is an obvious need to develop processes for teachers to discuss current issues and to help them provide background information to world events.

The question remains ‘Is understanding the world is simply a function of either normal child development or individual idiosyncratic contact with the world?’ Is it important that curriculum developers play a part? Current research indicates that teaching (both the pedagogy and the curriculum) is vital and that countering stereotypes at an early age is very important. Harwood (1998) found that many primary children even at the age of ten and eleven have difficulty understanding the nested relationship of places (that is that Sydney is in New South Wales which is in Australia) unless presented in concrete ways within a familiar context. Their understanding was not as simple
as from home to suburb to town to country thus reinforcing previous studies (LeRiche, 1992) that indicated that the expanding horizons approach to social education, an approach suggested by application of a simple Piagetian developmental model, is not appropriate, at least in children’s understanding of the world. Harwood suggests the need for systematic teaching as well as reinforcement of this idea whenever places are mentioned in class. This is an obvious ‘old fashioned’ approach to teaching place geography that appears to have lost favour. Where are all those world maps and globes in our classrooms?

It appears to be the case that if we are to make an impact on countering stereotypes of other peoples and countries then it needs to be done at an early age. Aboud (1988, cited in Harrington, 1998) argued that children as young as four expressed negative reactions to certain ethnic groups but these attitudes were relatively easy to change. However Friend (1995, cited in Harrington, 1998) found that although six year olds changed their opinions of Africa as a result of teaching, ten year olds were more reluctant to do so. Harrington (1998) in a nine week teaching program designed to eliminate stereotypes that children had already formed about Africa found that there was less tendency amongst the children to assign negative images to African countries and a better balance between positive and negative aspects of Africa being portrayed as a result of the teaching program. Harrington argued for the need to include systematic studies of distant lands at an early age in order to counter stereotyping. Note that this has to be systematic. Cursory coverage actually increases stereotyping - ‘This is China dragons and chopsticks’.

The need for systematic, in-depth study is reinforced by Weigand’s (1992) review of research findings on children’s attitudes towards distant places where he found that younger children relied on observable features such as physical features and clothing when deciding whether people are either ‘like us’ or ‘unlike us’ and their preference for distance places seemed to be based on the unusual or picturesque. Older children, however, tended to make judgements on the basics of personalities, habits, religion and politics. Persistence of favourable views towards other foreign peoples seemed to be dependent on attitudes developed at about the age of ten and was influenced by widening social contacts. It was found that attitudes to distant people and places were formed at least at the same time and probably before knowledge was gained about those places. Teachers must provide children with more detailed information about the groups for whom they hold stereotypes if countering simple stereotyping is to be achieved (Weigand, 1992).

Winter (1996) likewise found that developing countries’ studies in the school curriculum tended to be described in terms of physical environment (landscape, weather, wealth) whereas the so called developed countries were investigated in other ways (economic, business etc). The school curriculum also seemed to promote a view of the developing countries trying to attain the greatness of the wealthy. She argued that knowledge of place was influenced by race, colour, gender and previous experience and that teachers should make available a wide range of pictures of countries and people and not only describe but explain these images. She argued that great care needed to be made to not have an unquestioning acceptance of the inferior status of certain places and people in the world. Constant depictions of Africa as a land of mud huts and starving children reinforces negative attitudes to the people of that continent and a resultant lack of interest in pursuing study of the specific countries.

What did our study demonstrate?

From this study it was worrying that the children’s responses to the countries they did not like indicated that there was a large part of the world that children were afraid of. The research of Harrington (1998) would seem to indicate that this is a cause for some concern and that it is not something that we can dismiss as an issue that can be dealt with in secondary school. Does this sort of fear influence children’s everyday experiences in their own home
and country? We don’t really know. With young children their confused place knowledge might cause them more concern than they really need to experience. After all if you fear Afghanistan and don’t really know where it is there is uncertainty associated with all travel. In view of the research into the difficulty of changing stereotypes it is obvious that teachers will need to work hard on offering alternative views of many countries of the world for Australian children.

References


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