



Welcome to **ATTACK!** a two-page occasional publication. Most of **ATTACK!** will be concerned with the holistic curriculum which, if acted on, is a fundamental way to undermine the present undemocratic education system. Don't be discouraged if opportunities to teach holistically are limited, do your best, be a guardian, and act as a witness to this culturally significant and inspiring way of teaching and learning. **ATTACK!** is a partner to <https://networkkonnet.wordpress.com>

The 'feeling for' approach to social studies: it can be transformative Part 3

Social studies is not primarily about studying individual and cultural difference, it is about getting children to understand difference, to come to terms with it, to appreciate it – a very important distinction. It is not about value clarification, though that in any well-structured social studies will happen necessarily; it is not about big discussions about cultural difference and how the children should embrace it – it is about children developing a feeling for people based on knowledge gained from a series of open-ended activities leading to that key holistic happening – the interaction of the affective with the cognitive. The children come to understand through a process of gradual self-discovery that people in the past and present can be seen to have shared needs common at various levels of complexity, from basic to higher level ones, but with different ways of meeting them. To avoid obstructing the open-endedness of the approach and robbing children of what could be a transformational learning experience, the teacher should only rarely make direct references to those deeper purposes of social studies. Such direct references delivered directly to the children are likely to impede children thinking deeper and tangentially about the matter. As well, if a teacher

delivers those references directly to children, how, when children voice something like those references, does the teacher know whether they are merely repeating the teacher's thinking? Not only has the child been robbed of a discovery opportunity, the teacher has also lost an opportunity to gauge the thinking of both the child and his or her teaching effectiveness.

For thirty years, I have campaigned for a decisive main aim, a main aim that is a value expression but based on substantial and valid knowledge. And now, in a document that means a lot to me, I have to come to terms with one in which the writers prattle on about skills and knowledge with, in this case, no reference to values at all. Here we have a social studies document which hardly refers to the value ends of social studies. All learning affects values and no learning more so than in social studies. With values pushed to one side, the writers then feel free to concentrate on the current education obsession, specific and narrow learning outcomes. In practice, this will often mean a whole lot of skill and knowledge fragments that, in total, add up to very little.

The 'feeling for' approach states that learning is primarily about challenging children's existing attitudes; challenging the stereotypes children build up about other people, other groups of people, and themselves. The way to challenge those stereotypes is to get children close to the lives of people – to illuminate those people's lives – *and their own*. The advice in many 'feeling for' units, articles, and booklets suggests ways this can be done.

KEY

- sea
- railway line
- parks
- high-rise buildings and sky-scrapers
- apartment buildings
- high ground/hills

What does this map tell you about the lives of the people?

While everyday lives is the core attention of the 'feeling for' approach, primary children can and should be involved in happenings and occurrences of a more complex nature. That the 'feeling for' approach can help primary children handle more complex topics is proved by the way The Story of the Treaty and An Anzac Story are used to take children deep into the topics in valid ways and to terrific effect. For that reason, social studies for secondary school children should also be based on 'feeling for' principles, though the content will necessarily extend to more sophisticated parts of people's lives.

Discussion of the 'feeling for' approach is not a theoretical exercise, it was used in hundreds of classrooms before being overwhelmed by the narrowing of the curriculum, national standards, computers, inquiry learning (a form of it), and the bureaucratic control that occurred from the mid- to late '90s and beyond. During its heyday and still in a few classrooms, the process had and has a remarkable effect on children. Sometimes though, the simplicity of the process can be an obstruction to the imagining of the power of the approach. It is an approach based on the very simple idea that children should get close to the lives of the people they are studying and, in doing this, be helped to come to terms with individual and cultural difference and to understand themselves and their own culture. Getting children close to the lives of the people they are studying requires a main aim and a structure devoted to achieving this. It is a fundamental developmental challenge, not something that can be brought about as subsidiary to something else.

The label 'feeling for' obscures for some its underlying toughness. Challenging children in abstract adult terms will often result in a lack of meaningful connection. Some children will get fired up with anger without the necessary cognitive and informational context to make their attitudes rational and constructive. Other children will be indifferent because they haven't been touched. Children won't care for, in a lasting way, what they don't care about. I recently saw a y. 5-6 class working with the resource about a boy's life in a Chinese city. The children had clearly gained a 'feeling for' the boy as a result of a lot of activities based on pictures. They had a firm grasp of the details of his daily life and an empathy evident in the way they spoke about the boy and used his name. And then, in a natural way, the questions came – ranging from why were the houses smaller, why did he work so much harder at school work, to why is China sometimes in the news for punishing people who disagree with the government. All of which the children in discussion and the teacher prompting with occasional questions, handled in an open, informed, and sensitive manner.

The 'feeling for' approach has a cohesive structure from start to finish. There are no loose ends. Aims, cognitive and affective, attitudes and values, knowledge, concepts, important ideas, skills, learning theory, resources, place in the school curriculum, relationship to other curriculum areas, relationship with the functioning of the school, current events, social issues, computer use, evaluation, criteria – are all given their place in relationship to each other and to social studies. And in social studies being allocated its function and place in children's overall learning (a minor but still significant one) social studies can then do what it can sometimes wonderfully do – be transformational.

