

*The Use of Tertiary Texts in Australia*

Gilbert, R. (Ed.). (2004). *Studying Society and Environment: A Guide for Teachers (3rd Ed)*. South Melbourne, Australia: Cengage.

Marsh, C. (Ed.). (2008). *Studies of Society and Environment (5<sup>th</sup> Ed)*. Frenchs Forest, Australia: Pearson.

Review by Ruth Reynolds, University of Newcastle

These books are standard fundamental texts for teaching Social Studies, called Studies of Society and Environment (SSE) in most states of Australia, in Australian universities' pre-service teacher education programs. Both books are collections of articles by key teacher educators in various states and cover the disciplinary concepts, the historical underpinnings of where this curriculum area stands at this time and some of the key approaches to teaching SSE. The various states develop their own syllabus documents so there are differences across Australia in the ways teachers are expected to teach SSE so it is always a bit of a juggling act to be able to cater to all states' needs in a standard textbook. Both texts address this by drawing out the fundamental underpinnings of SSE and demonstrating how various state authorities address these fundamentals. This is essentially the strength in both these texts. The chapters are meant to be discussion starters. They don't simply give answers. They bring up crucial issues and provide guidance as to how these issues can be further enhanced. Both texts question everyday understandings.

Gilbert's text, which is about to be updated, divides the contributions into four areas. The first is an overall framing of SSE to discern the approaches to learning (critical inquiry), thinking skills, values and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) approaches. The second area provides a closer investigation of cross curricular perspectives evident in SSE: active and informed citizenship,

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, gender, sustainability and global futures). The third area speaks to the conceptual strands of studies of society and environment (time, continuity and change; place and space; culture and identity; resources, work and enterprise; natural systems and social systems including decision making). The last and quite small area addresses evaluation.

Marsh's text likewise has four sections. The first section is an overview of both SSE and how to plan and set out lessons for learning in SSE. It is followed by a section of the fundamentals of planning in the areas including concept building, useful teaching and learning techniques, values and assessment. The third section examines the various strands of learning, similarly to Gilbert considering some key strategies in each area while the fourth section discusses issues in the teaching of this area of study. Marsh identifies the key issues as the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, civics and citizenship education and multicultural and global studies.

The expansive coverage of these texts is both their strength and weakness. There is so much to read and digest, most pre-service teachers do not even attempt to read them all, especially when most teacher educators in Australia expect students to read outside the set text to more current readings, journals, debates on the internet, and so on. So teacher educators tend to dip into the two books and choose what they

like from both. Myself, I prefer Gilbert's stance on values and teaching thinking and some aspects of the conceptual strands but prefer Marsh's text on planning and assessing. For a country of only 20 million people we are lucky to have two texts that offer so much.

The fact that so much is offered, and that both texts are edited collections, is a positive and a negative issue. We are given a wide range of views but a key drawback in both texts is that there is no clear uniformity of approach. Some chapters are long and conceptually dense, others are short and cover everything with a brushstroke. Neither book offers the reader easily accessible ways to gather key points and perhaps flick through to particular concepts. They are both very traditional

texts in that regard and because they are both building on previous editions there is an element of new tacked on to old in a not-altogether seamless manner.

I have found both books to be invaluable sources of rich knowledge of Studies of Society and the Environment but my primary and early childhood pre-service teachers find it difficult to understand all of the detail and then translate that into practice. To address this I have developed my own text to cater to this audience. Perhaps this makes me a somewhat partial reviewer but I hope I can provide this review as one who values the contribution that these texts make to the area but is still cognisant of how they can be improved, particularly for primary and early childhood pre-service teachers.

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