



Values Education

Volume 2 Number 10, December 2008

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- [Hot Topic: Religion in Schools](#): (4 items)
- [Hot Topic: Creation, Evolution and Intelligent Design](#) (8 items)
- [Hot Topic: Indigenous Education](#) (5 items)
- [Research: Study shows poverty dramatically affects children's brains](#)
- [Humane Education](#): (2 items)
- [International Year of Planet Earth](#): (3 items)
- [International Year of the Frog](#): (3 items)
- [Conferences & Events: Changing Minds, Enhancing Futures](#)
- [ACSSO Email Newsletters](#)

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HOT TOPIC: RELIGION IN SCHOOLS

Dad withdraws daughter from Toowoomba school after Noah's Ark protest

Caroline Overington, *The Australian*, December 05, 2008

A QUEENSLAND father has taken action in the Anti-Discrimination Commission after his four-year-old daughter was asked to help make a replica of Noah's Ark at the local state school.

Ron Williams is opposed to religious instruction in state schools. He said he was taking action because he did not believe students should be "exposed to superstitious mumbo-jumbo, presented as fact, in an educational setting".

Mr. Williams complained that his daughter, Kathleen, now 5, was asked to make the "sizeable" replica of Noah's Ark during her prep class at Gabbinbar State School, "despite the fact that Queensland Education bans prep children from taking part in religious education programs in state schools". Mr. Williams said the Ark replica was later pinned to the classroom wall, and the teacher showed his daughter a DVD "with a Genesis theme and a book about Noah's Ark".

The school denies the claim, saying the children were shown a video of Evan Almighty - a comedy about a man who builds a replica of Noah's Ark - and a book about the Ark as part of a unit of study on animals and the noises they make.

Besides taking action in the Anti-Discrimination Commission, Mr. Williams intends to sue Queensland Education for the cost of having his children educated by distance education or some other, secular alternative to the state school program.

In taking action against Kathleen's teacher, Trina Savio, and the school's principal, Greg Brand, Mr. Williams said he was standing up for a "significant, disgruntled underbelly of parents" who do not want Christian stories taught at state schools. He said Australians lived in a society with a separation of church and state and he was therefore protecting Kathleen's fundamental human right: freedom from religion.

Read more at <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,24753674-5006786,00.html>

[< top >](#)

Genesis of complaint

Caroline Overington, The Australian, December 05, 2008

RON Williams is a father of five from Toowoomba in Queensland, a town he calls the "buckle of the Bible belt". He's not a Christian. He thinks the Bible stories - the creation of the world in six days, the mass evacuation of animals on an ark - are superstitious nonsense.

He does not want his five children, all under 10, exposed to any "mumbo-jumbo". So Williams enrolled his children in a state school. It was his understanding that they would "get an education free of supernatural stories presented as fact". But in his view, in Queensland at least, that's no longer possible.

Williams wants us to know that he's got nothing against Christmas. "The tree is up; my kids, they get presents." He has no objection to Santa or, for that matter, the Easter Bunny. "You can bring Santa to school. You can bring the Tooth Fairy, for all I care," he says. "What you cannot do is tell the children that any of this is true."

Read more at <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,,24751716-13881,00.html>

An extensive range of comments on this issue can be read at http://blogs.theaustralian.news.com.au/letters/index.php/theaustralian/comments/christian_knowledge_is_vital_to_a_well_rounded_education

[< top >](#)

Claims Queensland School chaplains 'worked miracles'

Caroline Overington, The Australian, December 06, 2008

GOD has cured at least one state school student of attention deficit disorder and another of asthma, according to interviews with chaplains employed in 2850 schools under a \$165 million federal government program. The Lord has also made it stop raining at a state school assembly in Queensland and performed other miracles to bring state school children to Jesus.

One chaplain was able to "fix the head" of a disruptive student by placing his hands upon the boy's head, and praying for him. These and other miraculous claims are included in a book about the national school chaplaincy program, which was introduced by the Howard government in October 2006.

It has led to 2850 chaplains being employed in state and non-government schools. According to new data, 72 per cent of these are working in state government primary and high schools: 1430 were in primary schools and 670 in high schools; the remainder in combined schools. One million students attend schools with a federal government-funded chaplain.

The chaplains have been funded at \$20,000 a year until 2010, but the groups that employ them, including Scripture Union, hope Kevin Rudd will extend the program. Under the rules of the program, chaplains are not permitted to actively recruit students to their faith. But a new book by former Queensland school chaplain Joelle Kabamba speaks openly of miracles in Australian schools.

In the book's foreword, Tim Mander, chief executive of Scripture Union, which has employed more than 700 chaplains for schools in Queensland, Tasmania and the ACT, says: "To have a full-time Christian presence in government schools in this ever-increasing secular world is an unbelievable privilege. Here

is the church's opportunity to make a connection with the one place through which every young person must attend: our schools."

Hugh Wilson, spokesman for The Fourth R, an organisation that supports secular education, said: "It's clear from the book that the schools are being used as recruiting grounds for Jesus. They organise prayer meetings at lunchtime. Students are being given time off sport to engage in evangelical Hillsong programs.

"At my son's high school, there are Buddhists, Muslims, atheists, agnostics, Christians - and Christians that are Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran. But Scripture Union has 500 evangelical Christian chaplains. We don't need chaplains. We may well need skilled, qualified people in schools."

Read more at <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,,24758438-13881,00.html>

[< top >](#)

Protests as Muslim school seeks site next to church

The Age, December 4, 2008 (AAP)

Hundreds of Gold Coast locals marched on the city council's headquarters on Monday to protest against plans to open the Australian International Islamic College at Carrara. The march followed a public meeting last month, attended by 400 opponents.

Tony Doherty is a minister with the neighbouring evangelical Dream Centre Christian Church, and the spokesman for the Concerned Carrara Residents Group staging the protests. He said residents were opposed to the college for town planning reasons, including insufficient car parking in the street and the site's location on a flood plain.

Mr. Doherty also said it made no sense to build the Muslim facility next to the church. "They want to build it right next to the Christian church," he said.

Read more at <http://news.theage.com.au/national/muslim-school-seeks-site-next-to-church-20081204-6r89.html>

[< top >](#)

HOT TOPIC: CREATION, EVOLUTION AND INTELLIGENT DESIGN

Over the past two weeks, SBS TV has screened a program "Intelligent Design on Trial" which documents the leading test case in the United States in relation to formal moves to require the teaching of intelligent design in the Science curriculum.

View the program at

http://player.sbs.com.au/programs#/programs_08/fullepisodes/latestepisodes/playlist/Judgement-Day-Intelligent-Design-On-Trial-Part-2-Full-Ep/

[< top >](#)

'Breathtaking Inanity': How Intelligent Design Flunked Its Test Case

Sean Scully, Time Magazine, 20 December 2005

Intelligent design is a religious idea and a Pennsylvania school board may not introduce it into the classroom, a federal judge ruled today. Judge John E. Jones III ruled that the Dover Area School Board improperly introduced religion into the classroom when it required science teachers to read a brief statement during the 9th grade biology class telling students that evolution was "Just a theory" and inviting them to consider alternatives.

The only alternative specifically mentioned was "intelligent design," the notion that life is so complex that it could not possibly have been the work of natural selection alone and must have been the work of an unspecified creative intelligence. "We find that the secular purposes claimed by the Board amount to a pretext for the Board's real purpose, which was to promote religion in the public school classroom," Jones wrote.

Members of the school board, and defenders of intelligent design generally, contend that their idea is a legitimate scientific rival to evolution. Since the notion of intelligent design does not specify who or what created life as we know it, they say, it is not an inherently religious idea.

Critics, however, say that intelligent design is inherently religious since it relies on a supernatural creative force, which cannot be tested or proven by scientific experiments. This, they said, is tantamount to introducing God into the process, an impermissible injection of religion into the classroom.

Jones agreed and pointedly rejected intelligent design as a legitimate scientific theory. "To be sure, Darwin's theory of evolution is imperfect," he wrote. "However, the fact that a scientific theory cannot yet render an explanation on every point should not be used as a pretext to thrust an untestable alternative hypothesis grounded in religion into the science classroom or to misrepresent well-established scientific propositions."

Jones' decision applies only to the Dover case, but the case had been closely watched nationwide since it was the first court test of intelligent design. The Supreme Court has repeatedly banned efforts to remove evolution from the classroom or to introduce Creationism, the idea that life on earth was created directly by God.

Read more at <http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1142625,00.html>

[< top >](#)

Creationism's Trojan Horse

Video Lecture, Barbara Forrest, June 21, 2007

In this presentation, Dr. Forrest provides a detailed look at her work in the Kitzmiller v. Dover School Board trial as well as an overview of the history of the intelligent design (ID) movement.

Dr. Barbara Forrest is a professor of philosophy at Southeastern Louisiana University. She is a recognized expert on the intelligent design creationist movement, having published numerous articles and a book on this topic.

She testified as an expert witness in Kitzmiller v. Dover School Board, the landmark case in which a group of parents successfully challenged an attempt to introduce the teaching of intelligent design into the public schools.

See video at http://www.centerforinquiry.net/digitalmedia/creationisms_trojan_horse

[< top >](#)

Church to make posthumous apology to Charles Darwin

David Thomas, Telegraph (UK), 14 Sep 2008

Charles Darwin is to receive an official apology from the Church of England over its opposition to his theory of evolution 150 years ago.

The bold and unusual step by the Church comes on the 200th anniversary of the naturalist's birth.

On a website specially set up to honour Darwin and his hypothesis, the church will admit that its Victorian hierarchy showed too much "anti-evolutionary fervour" when he published the notion in his book, the Origin of Species, in 1858.

The apology has been written by the Rev Dr Malcolm Brown, the church's director of mission and public affairs.

However it has cut little ice with Darwin's descendants. Andrew Darwin, a great-great grandson of the scientist, said: "Why bother? When an apology is made after 200 years, it's not so much to right a wrong, but to make the person or organisation making the apology feel better."

Dr Brown says that the hounding of Darwin was akin to the Roman Catholic church's treatment of astronomer Galileo in the 17th Century. Galileo was prosecuted for his belief that the Earth orbited the sun and ended his life under house arrest from the Inquisition.

Read more at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/religion/2958018/Church-to-make-posthumous-apology-to-Charles-Darwin.html>

[< top >](#)

Texas Scientists Object to Teaching of 'Weaknesses' in Evolution

The Chronicle of Higher Education, September 30, 2008

More than 800 Texas scientists, including hundreds of university and college professors, have signed a statement endorsing evolution as "an easily observable phenomenon that has been documented beyond any reasonable doubt" and opposing what they see as an effort to water down how it is taught in the state's public schools, reports the Associated Press.

The statement, drafted by members of the newly formed 21st Century Science Coalition, comes as the Texas State Board of Education works on revising the state's curriculum standards for science. The scientists support a proposed change in the standards for biology courses that would eliminate the long-held language of teaching students the "strengths and weaknesses" of theories. Talking of the "weaknesses" of evolution, they say, allows for the introduction of supernatural explanations into science courses.

But some members of the Board of Education — including its chairman, Don McLeroy — want to preserve that language. Dr. McLeroy, a dentist, told the Associated Press that "students need to understand what science is and what its limitations are," adding: "I look at evolution as still a hypothesis with weaknesses."

Read more at <http://chronicle.com/news/article/5250/texas-scientists-object-to-teaching-of-weaknesses-in-evolution>

[< top >](#)

Monitoring of creation studies left to schools

Gerard Noonan, Sydney Morning Herald, October 16, 2008

CHRISTIAN schools in NSW are teaching creationism or "intelligent design" with little or no monitoring of whether it is being improperly included in science classes in high schools.

The head of the NSW Board of Studies, John Bennett, told a NSW parliamentary committee yesterday that the education watchdog relied on the Christian schools network to assess whether schools kept to the NSW curriculum, which forbids the teaching of creationism in science classes.

Dr Bennett said teaching creationism was not outlawed in schools, but those that taught creationism were obliged to make clear to students that it was not part of the curriculum and could not be part of an examination assessment.

Responding to questions from a NSW Greens MP, John Kaye, he said that apart from an inspection once every five years and spot checks, the board also relied on individual complaints.

"I don't believe [improperly teaching creationism] is broadly spread," Dr Bennett said.

Read more at <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/monitoring-of-creation-studies-left-to-schools/2008/10/15/1223750129835.html>

[< top >](#)

UK Survey shows 'One third' of teachers back lessons in creationism

Richard Garner, Independent, 7 November 2008

Nearly one in three teachers believes creationism should be given the same status as evolution in the classroom, according to a poll of more than 1,000 teachers published today.

And almost a third already consider creationism or intelligent design to some extent during science lessons, the poll found. Eighteen per cent of science teachers quizzed thought the topics should be given equal status.

The size of the support for putting creationism on an equal footing has surprised teachers' leaders, who say creationism should be confined to a topic that can be raised during religious education classes.

"It would be wholly wrong to include creationism in the science curriculum," said Christine Blower, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers. "An overwhelming body of evidence, not assertion, supports the concept of evolution."

Read more at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/one-third-of-teachers-back-lessons-in-creationism-998192.html>

[< top >](#)

Letter from the President

Matthew LaClair, Campus Inquirer, December 2008

Currently, the Texas State Board of Education, with creationist Don McLeroy at the helm, is considering a proposal for a new science curriculum. McLeroy told the Associated Press that he views evolution as a "hypothesis with weaknesses."

Fortunately, over 800 scientists in Texas are trying to stop this proposal from going through. An organization created just two weeks before McLeroy's statement, called the 21st Century Science Coalition, is representing these scientists.

The term "strengths and weaknesses" has been a springboard for teachers to launch into a discussion about creationism or intelligent design. It is particularly disturbing because the "weaknesses" that people refer to do not exist. Some may claim, as my Junior year history teacher did, that evolution has not been proven or observed. In fact, the process has been observed repeatedly in organisms such as fruit flies.

Those who make these kinds of claims are generally not scientists and do not have a scientific background.

Read more at <http://www.centerforinquiry.net/oncampus/>

Matthew LaClair is serving as the student President of CFI On Campus. He is currently a freshman at The New School in New York, NY.

[< top >](#)

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HOT TOPIC: INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

English in, culture out under changes to remote schools

ABC News, Oct 15, 2008

A peak education body says the Northern Territory Government's plan for the bulk of classroom lessons at remote schools to be taught in English is a 'stunt'.

The Territory Government wants the first four hours of classes at all schools run in English, saying the move is necessary to boost literacy and numeracy levels in remote communities.

The Education Minister Marion Scrymgour says the plan is part of a restructure of the Education Department and will affect around 10 bilingual schools in the Territory.

"I've made it very clear to those schools that we are saying that language and culture is not part of the school.

"I am saying that it is literacy and numeracy that we are sending our kids into those schools to learn, and the language and culture lessons can certainly happen in the afternoon.

"I cannot stand by and see Aboriginal kids from remote communities continue to fail to meet national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy.

"This Government will not rest until results, particularly for remote Indigenous kids, begin to improve."

But the NT branch of the Council of Government Schools says the changes won't lift numeracy and literacy rates.

The council's Michael Duffy says it doesn't address the real shortfalls, like the lack of experienced teachers working in the bush.

"You need to do a hell of a lot more than simply insist on having English for the first four hours of every day.

"They will not improve attendance, they will not lift literacy rates.

"You've actually got to be a lot smarter than that."

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/10/15/2391514.htm>

[< top >](#)

Parents group says NT Govt has failed to consult on bilingual education

ABC Radio News 20 November 2008

A parents group is disputing the Northern Territory Government's assurance it consulted widely on its plan to make Aboriginal language schools teach more English classes.

The Government says it is fed up with Aboriginal children leaving school unable to read properly, and will require the first four hours of school to be taught in English.

The Education Minister Marion Scrymgour says she talked to the schools about the plan.

But, Michael Duffy from the Council of Government School Organisations says schools were not consulted before the announcement.

"She has visited a couple of schools after the fact, now when you say you make a decision based on consultation, what I hear is that you have the consultation before you make the decision.

"She has made the decision and now she's going round to people and saying what do you think of it, that is not consultation," he said.

"There are nine bilingual schools out of 150 schools in the Northern Territory, government schools.

"35 percent of kids across the board in the Northern Territory don't reach benchmarks.

"Now that suggests to me that there is a systemic failure, it's not the failure of the program," Mr. Duffy said.

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/11/20/2425090.htm>

[< top >](#)

Indigenous Languages & Multi-Lingual Education:

Panel discussion with NT Education Minister, ABC Radio (Stateline NT) 28 November 2008

MELINDA JAMES - Presenter: Bilingual education has been a hotly contested policy in Australia since its inception more than thirty years ago. Last month, the Territory Education Minister dropped a bombshell. Facing another round of terrible reading and literacy results, she effectively announced the program's demise at the end of this school year. The move has shocked many working in the education field who have complained about a lack of consultation or hard data to support the government's case. It's also sparked fury on the internet where bilingual supporters have been lamenting the social implications of English-only teaching. Danielle Parry reports.

LEON WHITE - Former School Principal: I believe it is the end of bilingual education. I believe it's been quite successful in comparison with like schools. And I challenge the minister to reveal the information that she has based her decision on.

MICHAEL DUFFY - COGSO: The department itself has said there needs to be, or the minister Syd Stirling in 2005-6, said there needs to be a renewed focus on bilingual education. The international evidence suggests that that's the way to go. The Little Children Are Sacred report said that's the way to go.

MARION SCRYMGOUR - Education Minister: Danielle, you know, if I was to sit back and do nothing and just accept the status quo on the ground in those communities and we see illiterate kids coming out of our school system, then I will be damned.

DANIELLE PARRY - Reporter: This is a story about the politics of language and its power to divide. A new chapter in the culture wars was sparked last month when the Territory government axed bilingual schooling after more than three decades. From the start of next year, the first 4 hours of every day will be taught in English making bilingual classes untenable.

MICHAEL DUFFY: Look, I don't doubt Marion's concern with the outcomes that we are seeing in remote schools. Everybody is worried about it. But there is this funny thing where ministers are expected to be seen to be decisive. It's sort of ministerial hubris if you like. "I'm right and the rest of you are wrong."

DANIELLE PARRY: The announcement came just days after the Education Department's CEO was fired. Some suspect bilingual education was being used as a diversion.

Read more at <http://www.abc.net.au/stateline/nt/content/2006/s2433078.htm>

[< top >](#)

Aboriginal kids 'risk losing identity'

Stuart Rintoul, The Australian, December 08, 2008

INDIGENOUS children are not receiving an education that enhances and promotes their Aboriginality, according to one of the nation's first indigenous school principals.

In a keynote speech at the opening of an international indigenous education conference in Melbourne, Colin Bourke said Aboriginal children needed to be educated "as Aborigines as well as Australians". Otherwise, Professor Bourke said, Aboriginal Australia would become just a memory, with Aboriginal people totally absorbed into the mainstream.

He said the educational achievements of Aborigines and non-Aborigines should not be compared, because whites generally designed school curriculums.

An adjunct professor and council member at Monash University, Professor Bourke retired from the University of South Australia in 1998 as deputy vice-chancellor, after serving several years as dean of the faculty of Aboriginal and Islander studies. He was the first Aboriginal primary school principal in Victoria, in 1971.

Professor Bourke said that in traditional times, Aboriginal children were educated in the equivalent of geography, history, literature, astronomy and law, giving them an "intellectual awareness, giving the individual a world view - an Aboriginal world view".

"Today, Aboriginal children and adults are being educated within a ... middle-class education system," he said.

Read more at <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,,24764268-2702,00.html>

[< top >](#)

Fed plan to Link welfare to school attendance bad move: NT council of government schools

ABC News 9 December 2008

The Federal Government plan to link school attendance to welfare payments is discriminatory, according to a peak Northern Territory education group.

Legislation passed by Federal Parliament will see some parents lose Centrelink payments for 13 weeks, if their children miss too much school.

The plan will be trialed in eight regions next year, including six Aboriginal communities in the Territory.

Michael Duffy from the N-T Council of Government Schools has told the ABC punishing parents isn't the way to go.

"They haven't discussed it with anybody, they haven't gone out and talked about how do you come to grips with this attendance business, what's school about?"

"We have to set in place a process of education and we've actually got to be patient.

"The fundamental difficulty is that it's going in with the big stick approach rather than actually actively trying to engage parents in the whole adventure of schooling."

Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/12/09/2441508.htm>

[< top >](#)

=====

OPINION

So, Ms Gillard, the education debate is about values. Whose?

Kenneth Davidson, The Age, December 5 2008

Although Education Minister Julia Gillard hasn't quite had the guts to say it, the clear conclusion from the education funding outcome of the COAG meeting last weekend is that the Federal Government is hell-bent on making government schools the residual system. This is the real meaning of the so-called education revolution.

Last August, a research paper on school funding for the Australian Education Union by Jim McMorrow showed that, based on forward estimates contained in the Government's first budget, unless it restored government schools to the 1996 funding relativity with non-government schools by giving them another \$1.5 billion a year, schools could lose up to 1000 teachers.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd called the report inherently dishonest even though McMorrow had been a senior bureaucrat in the NSW Education Department, is an honorary professor of education at Sydney University and was an adviser to Jenny Macklin when she was shadow education minister.

Gillard dismissed McMorrow's figures on the grounds that "the conclusions are based on information currently provided in the budget papers". Wow! So much for budget accuracy.

As Gillard says, the debate is no longer about resourcing schools, it's about values. Perhaps. But the values that underpin the increasingly inequitable funding that is leading to a two-tiered education system can no longer stand the light of day in a civilised society. But a civilised society is a hollow concept unless it is based on giving children equal educational opportunity.

Read more at <http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/so-ms-gillard-the-education-debate-is-about-values-whose-20081204-6rhe.html?page=-1>

Kenneth Davidson is a senior columnist for The Age

[< top >](#)

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RESEARCH

Study shows poverty dramatically affects children's brains

Greg Toppo, USA Today, 7 December 2008

A new study finds that certain brain functions of some low-income 9- and 10-year-olds pale in comparison with those of wealthy children and that the difference is almost equivalent to the damage from a stroke.

"It is a similar pattern to what's seen in patients with strokes that have led to lesions in their prefrontal cortex," which controls higher-order thinking and problem solving, says lead researcher Mark Kishiyama, a cognitive psychologist at the University of California-Berkeley. "It suggests that in these kids, prefrontal function is reduced or disrupted in some way."

The study adds to a growing body of evidence that shows how poverty afflicts children's brains. Researchers have long pointed to the ravages of malnutrition, stress, illiteracy and toxic environments in low-income children's lives.

Research has shown that the neural systems of poor children develop differently from those of middle-class children, affecting language development and "executive function," or the ability to plan, remember details and pay attention in school.

Read more at http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2008-12-07-childrens-brains_N.htm

[< top >](#)

=====

HUMANE EDUCATION

Farmland

Virtual animal welfare video game, reviewed by Carole de Fraga, December 2008

A new online video game released by the European Commission (EC) shows children what animal welfare can mean on a farm. Interactive and informative, "Farmland" is for children aged between 9 and 12 and aims to help tomorrow's consumers make informed choices about the food they will be buying.

Throughout the game children are encouraged to think about the welfare of animals in the context of food production and consumption. This is a global concept.

From an Australian perspective, the negative aspects of keeping laying hens in battery cages are pointed out and we learn that "from the end of 2011 battery cages will no longer be used in the European Union because they are bad for animal welfare"

The EU's superior requirements for housing pigs are explained and in a visual Power Point the EU concedes that "they are working hard to find better solutions" for "mum and her piglets" than the present ubiquitous farrowing crate.

The game teaches that to be a good farmer, the player needs to show total respect for the animal and follow the principles of the Five Freedoms:

- Freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition
- Freedom from discomfort
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease
- Freedom to express normal behaviour
- Freedom from fear and distress

An online teacher's toolbox is being developed containing exercises that can be used in class to help children better understand the issue of animal welfare. It will be released later this year.

The website is translated in nine European languages, so also useful in Australia for teachers of Languages Other Than English (LOTE) – including German, Greek, Spanish, French and Italian.

Read more at <http://www.farmland-thegame.eu>

Carole de Fraga is the Oceania representative for Compassion in World Farming
<http://www.ciwf.org.au>

[< top >](#)

UN declares International Year of the Gorilla 2009

Jane Goodall issues call to save gorillas

Louise Gray, Telegraph, 02 Dec 2008

Gorillas are increasingly in danger from wars like the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo and continuing deforestation. The UN Environment Program is so concerned that the high-powered organisation has named 2009 "The Year of the Gorilla".

The initiative, which follows similar drives to save the turtle and the dolphin, brings together UNEP and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to raise at least £400,000.

Renowned primatologist Jane Goodall, famous for her work with chimps, called conservationists around the world to raise awareness of the problems faced by gorillas.

"It is time for us to pool all of our resources toward saving these magnificent creatures (and toward ensuring a future for this close cousin of humankind," she said.

The last decade has seen a steep drop, from 17,000 to 5,000 gorillas in the Democratic Republic of Congo, while Mountain Gorillas in the Great Lakes region number only 700, UNEP said. The main threats include hunting for "bush meat," a prized delicacy in western Africa, as well as logging, slash-and-burn agriculture and armed conflict, notably in DR Congo.

Read more at

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/democraticrepublicofcongo/3541723/Jane-Goodall-issues-call-to-save-gorillas.html>

Visit the Year of the Gorilla Website at <http://yog2009.org/>

[< top >](#)

=====

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF PLANET EARTH 2008

West's climate change focus 'wrong'

David Curry, Canberra Times, 7 December 2008

THE SOLUTION to climate change must come from a reduction in consumption and a more sustain-able way of life, rather than a more efficient use of resources, the co-author of the Oslo Declaration of Sustainable Consumption says.

Uchita de Zoysa, a Sri Lankan researcher who has contributed to global United Nations conventions such as the Earth Summit and the Sustainable Development Summit, said "efficient resource utilisation" was the wrong approach to addressing climate change.

"That is what's been happening since industrialisation [and] it's the new European mantra. Without changing their behavioural patterns, efficiently consuming the same loads is not going to help," Mr. de Zoysa said.

He said if the world continued on the current consumption model, two earths would be needed to sustain it by 2030. But it was hypocritical of the West to point the finger at China and India.

"You guys in Australia are the largest per capita carbon dioxide emitters in the world," Mr. de Zoysa said. "But suddenly all sins are with India and China these are the biggest criminals on earth, because they're developing."

Read more at <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/news/local/news/general/wests-climate-change-focus-wrong/1379662.aspx>

[< top >](#)

Looming Ecological Credit Crunch?

ScienceDaily (Nov. 6, 2008)

The world is heading for an ecological credit crunch as human demands on the world's natural capital reach nearly a third more than earth can sustain.

That is the stark warning contained in the latest edition of WWF's Living Planet Report, the leading statement of the planet's health. In addition global natural wealth and diversity continues to decline, and more and more countries are slipping into a state of permanent or seasonal water stress.

The report, produced with the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) and the Global Footprint Network (GFN), shows more than three quarters of the world's people now living in nations that are ecological debtors, where national consumption has outstripped their country's biological capacity.

"Most of us are propping up our current lifestyles, and our economic growth, by drawing - and increasingly overdrawing - on the ecological capital of other parts of the world," Mr. Leape said.

"If our demands on the planet continue to increase at the same rate, by the mid-2030s we would need the equivalent of two planets to maintain our lifestyles."

"We are acting ecologically in the same way as financial institutions have been behaving economically - seeking immediate gratification without due regard for the consequences," said ZSL co-editor Jonathan Loh. "The consequences of a global ecological crisis are even graver than the current economic meltdown."

Read more at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/11/081105192704.htm>

Download the Living Planet Report 2008 at http://assets.panda.org/downloads/lpr_2008.pdf

[< top >](#)

Urgent Action On International Coral Reef Crisis Urged

ScienceDaily (Nov. 21, 2008)

Coral reef scientists and policy makers from the world's most prominent coral reef nations are meeting in Australia this week to develop urgent action plans to rescue the world's richest centre of marine biodiversity from gradual decline.

Human pressures on the Coral Triangle have raised grave concerns about the future of its fish, corals and other sea life, leading to a proposal by Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono for joint action by six governments, scientists, agencies and environmental non-government organisations of the region.

Marine scientists from the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies (CoECRS) at James Cook University and the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) are assisting the largest reef conservation program ever undertaken, known as the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security.

The Coral Triangle (CT) spans Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste and the Solomon Islands, and has over 200 million inhabitants, a third of whom depend on the sea for food security or livelihood.

Read more at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/11/081110112200.htm>

[< top >](#)

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE FROG 2008

Modern Genetics Versus Ancient Frog-killing Fungus

ScienceDaily (Oct. 24, 2008)

Scientists at the University of Idaho currently are involved in a CSI-like investigation of a killer known to have been running rampant for the past decade. Its name is *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (Bd). It is a "chytrid" fungus that lives on keratin, a type of protein found in the skin of amphibians, and is particularly deadly for certain species of frogs.

Previous studies have shown that once Bd is introduced to a habitat, up to 50 percent of amphibian species and 80 percent of individuals may die within one year. The fungus has been studied for the past decade, yet scientists still do not know much about how Bd kills its host.

However, Rosenblum's new paper brings scientists one step closer to solving the mystery. The study uses some of the most advanced genetic technology available in an attempt to understand how the fungus works at the most basic level. It identifies several gene families for future study, including one strong candidate that may be a key element in the killing process.

Read more at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/10/081014111403.htm>

[< top >](#)

Ecosystem-level Consequences Of Frog Extinctions

ScienceDaily (Oct. 23, 2008)

Streams that once sang with the croaks, chirps and ribbits of dozens of frog species have gone silent. They're victims of a fungus that's decimating amphibian populations worldwide.

Such catastrophic declines have been documented for more than a decade, but until recently scientists knew little about how the loss of frogs alters the larger ecosystem.

A University of Georgia study that is the first to comprehensively examine an ecosystem before and after an amphibian population decline has found that tadpoles play a key role keeping the algae at the base of the food chain productive.

"Many things that live in the stream depend on algae as a base food resource," said lead author Scott Connelly, a doctoral student who will graduate in December from the UGA Odum School of Ecology. "And we found that the system was more productive when the tadpoles were there."

Read more at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/10/081016124252.htm>

[< top >](#)

Low Concentrations Of Pesticides Can Become Toxic Mixture For Amphibians

ScienceDaily (Nov. 18, 2008)

Ten of the world's most popular pesticides can decimate amphibian populations when mixed together even if the concentration of the individual chemicals are within limits considered safe, according to University of Pittsburgh research. Such "cocktails of contaminants" are frequently detected in nature, a new paper notes, and the Pitt findings offer the first illustration of how a large mixture of pesticides can adversely affect the environment.

Professor Relyea found that a mixture of all 10 chemicals killed 99 percent of leopard frog tadpoles as did the insecticide-only mixture; the herbicide mixture had no effect on the tadpoles. While leopard frogs perished, gray tree frogs did not succumb to the poisons and instead flourished in the absence of leopard frog competitors.

Read more at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/11/081111183041.htm>

[< top >](#)

CONFERENCES & EVENTS

Changing Minds, Enhancing Futures: Australian Guidance & Counselling Association Conference 2009

15-17 April 2009, Hobart, TAS

Conference presentations will be appropriate for principals and teachers, as well as school psychologists, school counsellors and other school support people.

Keynote speakers are Joe Tucci (Australian Childhood Foundation) who is giving a full day presentation (16th April) - An education perspective on understanding and responding to complex trauma and attachment.

John Geake (neuropsychologist from Oxford Brookes University and Department of Neurology, University of Oxford) will be speaking on how the brain learns and implications for teaching.

Read more at <http://www.agca.com.au>

[< top >](#)

ACSSO EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

- **Australian Education Digest** : <http://www.acsso.org.au/aed.htm> (weekly)
- **International News Roundup** : <http://www.acsso.org.au/roundup.htm> (monthly)
- **Values Education** : <http://www.valuesineducation.org.au/news.htm> (monthly)

- **Languages Education** : <http://www.languageseducation.com/news.htm> (monthly)
- **Ensemble - Music Education** : <http://www.ensemble.org.au/news.htm> (monthly)
- **Public Education Voice** : <http://www.acsso.org.au/pev.htm> (quarterly)
- **Family School Partners** : http://www.familyschool.org.au/?page_id=6 (quarterly)

[< top >](#)

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