

Teacher case writing sample

Finding your imagination

Introduction:

Today I am going to share with you some of my experiences of teaching a values-based education unit. I may jump around a bit and will probably leave out some vital bits but I'm basically just going to talk about how I felt things went. I've written it down because if I don't I will really waffle!

We had three classes undertaking the values project. We planned the units together with John* and Joan and we all came up with some wonderful ideas. Despite planning together and pretty much deciding to do the same activities, each class has of course had quite a different journey.

Compelling Issue:

Barbara and Leanne's classes were keen from the start and really seemed to be working well. I had a group of boys who were most uncooperative and rather than caring about their fellow classmates or anything that we were learning about, they were only interested in a game they were playing at lunch time based on Star Wars and Lord of the Rings but which was actually closer to Lord of the Flies.

Story:

My boys were more like Grade Nines than Grade Twos and had quite a serious attitude problem in class. They were rude, they called out, they constantly hurt other children, they wrote nasty notes, they made hurtful comments and they basically thought that everything that we did was boring and 'sucked'. Unfortunately their attitude spoiled things for the other children and I was spending a lot of time on behaviour management rather than enjoying the unit.

We found a wonderful spot in our playground as our 'special place'. We had planned to do some of our attentiveness activities in this place but sadly my boys didn't like it. Our place is grassy, treed and near the creek. I think it's a very pleasant place. The first thing we did was to ask each child to find a comfortable spot in the shade and sit quietly just looking around them, listening to the sounds, smelling the smells...you get the picture.

My boys fussed, complained, couldn't settle, had to be separated, wouldn't stop calling out to each other and generally spoilt our quiet time. One boy would not sit on the grass as he didn't want to get dirty. He sat in the sun, in the cement drain near by and called out comments such as 'I'm bored', 'Can we go now?', 'This sucks', 'Jack is moving!', 'Is it snack time yet?', and finally, 'Can I go to the toilet?'. The other boys were sniggering and making silly comments. On the whole my boys were not doing a great job of contemplating nature. The girls were quite angry with them and found it hard to settle when the boys wouldn't.

When we gathered together to talk about what we'd seen and heard my class came up with such things as 'a rock', 'some dirt', 'some rubbish'. Not a poetic bunch. Barbara's class had come up with sparkling leaves and glittering water and other wonderful things. I decided we'd better read some more poetry.

One day we set out for our special spot armed with drawing pads and charcoal. The children all found a spot on their own and began to draw. I moved around looking at the art work. When I came to one boy, I found a blank sketch book but a very black face. This boy had drawn all over his face until it was totally black and all over his arms and his legs. When I asked him what he had been doing he said that he was the 'evil one'. Unfortunately one of the other boys had also decided to decorate himself so we ended up back at the classroom with a rather cranky teacher and a washcloth.

The next time we went to our special spot one boy ripped the leaves off a plant and another spent his time squashing ants and beetles. Two boys had a tiff. One boy wet himself and another was bitten by an ant and howled. We ended up back at the classroom talking about 'behaviour' again rather than discussing nature. I began to despair.

Barbara and Leanne's classes seemed to be really enjoying their special times down at the special place. They were really involved in the whole unit and were keen to preserve nature. They kept coming up to me and telling me tales about what my boys had been up to: ripping the legs off a stick insect, digging up garden plants, carving things in trees, throwing rubbish into the garden, poking a lizard with a stick...basically crimes against nature. My boys were also playing a game where the idea was to gang up and stalk a weak child, catch that child and inflict pain.

After a few chats with parents and a few visits to the Principal's Office, this game stopped, but I still had to find a way to help my boys to become more caring and responsible. We'd read *Muddles of Magic* but the story didn't seem to inspire my boys. We had tried to use our imaginations but one boy said that he wasn't interested in *Muddles of Magic* because it wasn't real. He said that he had 'lost his imagination'. Unfortunately he is a popular boy and anything that he said really influenced the other children.

I decided to put out a lot of soft toys to see if the children would care for them. This did work and I discovered one of the boys cuddling an old possum toy with ripped ears and comforting it. There were a few fights about who got to play with which toy, but overall the reaction was good. The girls certainly enjoyed playing with the toys.

The next thing I tried was to talk about pets and to try to relate this to Mongo from *Muddles*. Only one of the boys in my group had a pet but luckily he was the 'ring leader', if you like. I asked him to do a talk about his pets. He brought in a wonderful photo of his dog and gave a really great talk. Things were changing. I could see that this boy did care about something. Also, the parents of my boys had banned the Star Wars game and one family was trying out a different diet. This made a great difference to one boy. His classroom behaviour did improve.

While doing this unit, we were looking at the idea of 'self', 'others' and 'place'. I had tried to establish a special place, but this didn't really work. My boys weren't really relating well to others. The only thing left was to look at self. On the whole my class really needed some self-development. The other classes were starting by looking at 'place', then 'others' and then looking inwards to 'self'. I felt that we needed to look at ourselves first, then how we relate to others and then to look at our special place.

The invitation to the possum party at the environmental centre arrived but one boy spoiled it all by saying that it was stupid because it wasn't real and he didn't want to go to a stupid possum party because we had made it up anyway. Hmm. I

could see that some of the girls and the other boys were really disappointed. The whole thing fell flat.

Eventually we did make it and we experienced the *Muddles of Magic* phenomena. I can't honestly say that my boys co-operated very well in the forest and one boy kept calling out things to spoil the magic BUT towards the end of the day, my boy who had lost his imagination, came up and told me that he had 'found his imagination'.

This was a real turning point for the class. Once this boy found his imagination he began to encourage others, most of the boys really did want to use their imaginations and enjoy class activities. Once the 'leader' had found his imagination then it was okay for them.

Our visits to our special spot became quieter, we sketched quietly, we listened to birds, and we wrote poems. We talked about caring and responsibility and were able to write about them. Our art works improved and we were able to concentrate better. We wrote about our own special places and the children created 'heart maps' of things that were special to them.

A lot of things led up to this change. The children were maturing, the Star Wars game was banned, some diets had changed, Amanda had worked her drama magic with them and we had 'found our imaginations'. It took a long time to settle this particular class. Originally they had short attention spans, were not interested in nature and were not particularly caring, but this has changed. I guess another reason for the change was that we persisted. I read stories about animals and we talked about how the people in the stories showed care or compassion or responsibility. We actually explicitly talked about values and why they are important. Every day we would work on attentiveness. Mostly we did this by daily brain gym and visualisations and by drawing daily in our little black books for longer and longer times.

Concluding Thoughts:

Overall despite a shaky start, I feel that we have achieved some really pleasing results with this unit. I asked the children to write about what values are and some children wrote amazing things. They came up with some great things about respect and we included these in our painting.

Overall by doing this unit I have learned that things are not always easy and that children won't oblige when you want them to – no matter how enthusiastic you are. I also learned that you should never give up. If something isn't working then you need to approach it from a different angle rather than throw it away.

*Names have been changed