

Co-curricular activity

Peer support and values education

This activity looks at how the Peer Support Program by the Peer Support Foundation can enhance values education in a school.

Year levels

The Peer Support Program is designed for students in Early Adolescence: leaders (14-16 years) who run the program for students 11-13 years.

Explicit values focus

- Care and Compassion
- Fair Go
- Honesty and Trustworthiness
- Respect
- Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion

KLA focus

- English
- Health and Physical Education
- Society and Environment

School profile

Christian Brothers' College Burwood is a Year 7-10 boys' high school located in the inner western suburbs of Sydney. The Year 7 cohort is usually made up of boys from a large number of different schools. In 2006, the Year 7 students came from over 37 different schools in the Sydney Metropolitan area.

Reason for the co-curricular activity

The transition to high school can be a scary time for students, especially for students from small primary schools. This transition therefore needs to be handled delicately to minimise the anxiety that students may experience. We have found the implementation of a number of activities and programs, including the Peer Support Program, to be effective in reducing anxiety felt by students making the transition to high school.

The Peer Support Program has been a part of the school curriculum for a number of years, but it was due for a revamping. Consequently, two members of staff were retrained in 2005 by the Foundation. Throughout the implementation of the Peer Support Program, these two members of staff worked closely with other staff in order to prepare themselves to lead groups of Year 7 boys when they started school the following year. A number of Year 9 boys were selected as Peer Support leaders for the following year.

Implementation and development

Preparation of staff

As part of the Peer Support Program the two staff members attended a two-day course run by the Peer Support Foundation <www.peersupport.edu.au>. Following the course these staff members were able to train the group of Year 9 students to deliver the program to the Year 7 cohort of the following year.

Preparation of leaders

At Christian Brothers' College Burwood it was decided that the boys who were going to deliver the program to Year 7 students would be trained off-site to minimise the distractions that may arise during the course of the two-day training.

In week 8 of term 4 the Year 9 students, along with two former Peer Support leaders from the previous year, went on a two-day, overnight camp lead by the trained teachers and were taken through the Secondary Leadership program. During the two days of camp, the boys ran through many of the activities that they would later run with their small groups of Year 7 boys.

Peer Support camp

While away, the boys were given the opportunity to examine their own values and the values that they would be trying to instil in the Year 7 boys placed in their charge. These values were addressed in a number of activities, including empathy tasks, in which the boys were asked to place themselves in the shoes of the new Year 7 boys. There were activities that forced them to place their trust in their peers, and an activity that required the boys to identify the different personality types that are likely to be present in their small groups. The boys were then lead in the formulation of some strategies that would help them in running the groups.

All the activities had both a practical and theory component. The boys were asked to examine their conscience on a number of occasions. They were instructed in the values of empathy, understanding and tolerance that comprise the Peer Support Program. They were also instructed on how they might be able to pass these values on to the Year 7 students.

Preparation for the Peer Support Program

The new Peer Support leaders now in Year 10 were at school on the first day that the Year 7 boys arrived in term 1 and they lead them through an orientation program.

The Year 7 students went on camp in week 2 and the Peer Support leaders visited the campsite and ran some of the sports activities with the younger students. This was to allow the Year 7 boys to get to know their leaders a little better before the 8-week program that began in week 3 of the first term.

The 8-week program

In week 3 of term 1, the program began. A day prior to the scheduled first session, the leaders met with the facilitator and ran through a number of points. The leaders were given a list of boys that would be in their group for the next 8 weeks and a question and answer session followed.

On the day of the first session, and every subsequent Peer Support session, the Year 7 cohort gathered in their groups at their allocated area with their Year 10 leader. The sessions were conducted over eight weeks of term 1. They began in week 2 and went through to the end of the term. Each session ran for the duration of a lesson, or 45 minutes.

During these sessions, the Peer Support leaders took the boys through the different activities, which are designed to help build relationships and facilitate

lifelong learning skills. In addition, the program provides the Year 7 boys with another support person within the school.

Following each of the Peer Support sessions, usually at the end of the day or during lunch on the following day, the leaders met with the facilitating teacher for a debriefing session.

Outcomes

Outcomes for individual students varied and both Year 7 and Year 10 students benefited from the program, developing a greater awareness of the values listed.

- The leaders were able to attain a greater understanding of the values listed through the implementation of the program and their instruction of the Year 7 boys.
- The Year 7 boys were able to learn from their leaders about the values of empathy, tolerance and inclusion and others in a practical setting.
- The school yards were more inclusive areas for all students, not just for the 'popular' students.
- The leaders were also able to examine their own values and, in many cases, there was also a change in them, not just in the members of their group.

School contact details

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