

Values Education: A Student Action Teams approach

Our Values Education Journey...So Far...

Students from a cluster of six Catholic Primary Schools in Melbourne's north-eastern suburbs - in the City of Manningham - have been exploring the application of values in their schools and communities in 2005-6. They have been using a Student Action Teams approach to this project: researching the nature and operation of values in their communities and then deciding on and implementing action to address concerns they had.

An article in Connect 157 (February 2006) introduced the project and reported on the research phase.

The 'final' Student Forum was held in May 2006. At that forum, students reported on the project's progress, on what actions they were taking, and on the project's impact on them and their schools.

These are the initial reports to that Forum from students from the six schools.

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We first heard about the Values Education Good Schools Project in July last year. Our teachers explained to us that our six schools had been lucky enough to be selected by the Australian Government to work as a group to look at what was important to us as students about values.

We were told that we would work in Student Action Teams and that the students in these teams would be investigating where we saw, heard and felt values operating in our homes, schools and community - and where we didn't see, hear or feel them. The students would then be responsible for deciding what action we would put in place to make things better for all of us.

It has been an amazing journey and we have met lots of new people and had lots of fun. Today we would like to share with you what we have done during this time.

Student Forum One

Initially the students in each of the six schools brainstormed about what values are and what they thought the important values were in their school communities. We brought these first ideas to an inter-school Student Forum and shared them with other students and with the staff working as the coordinators in our schools.

At this Forum, we were introduced to the nine national values that the Australian Government had defined. We looked at the values that we had identified against the values chosen by the Australian Government and, in most cases, reached agreement that we were talking about similar things. However we also decided to change the title and definition of one of the national values from 'Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion' to 'Friendship and Acceptance' as we decided it was easier to understand, particularly for the younger students in our schools. We also discussed what these values might look like within our homes, schools and wider communities.

We made an important decision and that was that we did want to investigate this topic further. We decided we wanted to research these values as to whether we could see or not see them, hear or not hear them and feel or not feel them in our homes, school and communities.

Researching Values

Student Action Teams were set up in each of our schools. Each Student Action Team chose three of the nine values to examine in more detail, with two of our schools looking at each value. In our schools, some Student Action Teams would work within a single class with a teacher, while other teams came from several classes at the school.

The students in the teams started by discussing our values further, writing the meanings of them to show what they meant to us ... and we asked others about this too. We developed 'Y' charts and similar devices to show what each value *looked*, *sounded* and *felt* like.

The Teams then designed various types of data collection to explore these values within our families, schools and communities. We surveyed students and parents and community members, we interviewed people, and we observed behaviour in our schools. Some of the survey questions asked people about how important they thought these values were; other questions asked about changes over time, or whether people thought they and others treated each other using these values.

Research Workshop

A student Research Workshop was held in October, and this allowed the representatives from each school's Student Action Team to discuss the investigations we were doing, and gain some new skills in research design, data collection and analysis of information. In particular, we learnt how to use computer software to graph results using spreadsheets to display findings, how to look at comments and other forms of qualitative data, how to make generalisations about the observations we had made, and how to get information from community sources. In each team, the aim was to have someone who was an 'expert' in the different areas of research and who would share that expertise with other students. These 'experts' then went back to their schools and shared what they had learnt at the research workshop with the other members of their Student Action Teams so all members of the team knew how to collate and analyse data.

Student Forum Two

The second major Student Forum was held late in 2005. We called this the 'hinge forum' as it was the hinge between the research and action phase. At this forum the students presented the results of our investigations. We paired up with the school that was looking at the same values, and the two teams of students reached agreement on the definition of the value. We then compared our research and findings and produced a poster summarising our work to date. We talked about what we needed to do to make this happen in our lives.

Roger then led us on a 'guided visualisation' in which we each imagined a future world where the specific value that we were investigating was seen strongly in action, and we compared this to what we saw in our world today. In school teams we then shared our concerns, and started to look at some priorities for action:

- *What big objectives do we have?*
- *What action is best suited to achieving that?*

Finally the groups began to brainstorm what action is and what we would need to do to take this action. We talked about what possible actions that the teams could take in 2006.

Action Workshop

At the action workshop we were challenged to look at some action we could take to solve a problem we had identified through our research about our value. We learnt that before we take action we had to think about what sorts of action were possible. Out of all the possibilities we had identified through our research, the first thing we had to do was choose the value we wanted to work on and in what area it was: home, school or in the community. We had to agree what was happening now, and then agree on how we wanted it to be and what we would have to do to achieve this. We also had to look at what may stop this from happening. How we would achieve this would be our action. We then set out the steps we would take to make this happen.

We would now like to share with you what action the Student Action Teams have taken in each of our schools:

St Clement of Rome Primary School

The St Clement of Rome Student Action Team is made up of students from Years 5 and 6.

The action phase of our project began with our group reviewing our three values. They were 'honesty and trustworthiness', 'integrity' and 'freedom'. The Student Action Team chose honesty and trustworthiness to focus on in our school community, because the world we wanted to create is one where all share peace, accept responsibility and can depend on each other. We believe that, if we can highlight the values of honesty and trustworthiness in our community, then we can create a more harmonious place to share.

After reviewing our data, we decided to use our Certificate of Merit system to highlight the words and actions students were using with each other. Our certificate of merit awards were given to people who were trying hard or doing good things in their classroom. Now the focus is on people who are displaying the words and actions of honesty and trustworthiness in the classroom and outside.

Two representatives from the Student Action Team attended a staff meeting to discuss the proposal with staff. The staff were asked to discuss this with their classes and talk about the words and actions that teachers would be looking for. This was a really positive meeting and the change to our certificates now has a values focus.

Students and parents were informed of this change at the school assembly and through the school newsletter. We will continue to use these forums to inform our community of the things that are happening in our Student Action Team.

Our next step is to meet again with teachers to collect data that will show us if this process has made a difference. This will also help us to plan for future actions.

We believe that, by working together and creating this positive vibe around our school, we will make our world a better place to be.

Our Lady of the Pines Primary School

The values we investigated at Our Lady of the Pines were 'responsibility', 'freedom' and 'integrity'.

At the second Student Forum, we brainstormed ideas and identified the issue of bullying. The Student Action Team came up with the idea of establishing a Peer Mediation Support Team. The SAT discussed the idea and everyone thought it was really positive because this project would include each value we had investigated:

- As seniors at our school, we could take responsibility for creating a more friendly and happier environment;
- Every child has the right to have freedom and to feel safe in the playground;
- If we really believe what we said about responsibility and freedom, we show our integrity by doing what we said we would do, that is, putting into place the Peer Mediation Support Team.

We wrote a letter to Mrs Abbott, our Principal, outlining our idea and asking her if we could do a presentation to the leadership team. We presented to the leadership team on the 7th April. All the members of the leadership team thought the Peer Mediation Support Team was a great idea and fully supported the SAT project. We made an appointment with Mrs Abbott and organised to present our project to all the staff at a staff meeting.

We invited Mrs Cahill to come to our school to talk to the SAT about what Peer Mediation involved.

On Wednesday 26th April, the SAT presented to the whole staff at the staff meeting. All staff members thought it was a great idea and agreed to support the Peer Mediators Program.

This is our timeline from here:

- Present to all Grade 5 and 6 students and request applications for Peer Mediators to be in by May 12th;
- Find out the costs involved in badges, fluoro vests, clipboards and training manuals;
- Meeting with Mrs Abbott to discuss our budget;
- Speak to Grade 5 and 6 teachers and organise dates and times for training;
- Confirm training dates and times with Mrs Cahill;
- Have the first student Mediation Support Team ready for term 3, week 1.

St Charles Borromeo Primary School

At St Charles Borromeo we have been researching three values: 'friendship and acceptance', 'care and compassion' and 'fair go'. After collecting surveys, interviews

and observations, the Student Action Teams (or SAT) has decided to extend our buddy system. We already had buddies between Preps and Year 6s, and now we also have the Year 1/2s buddied up with the 3/4s. We realised that the 4/5s were the only class left without buddies, so we decided to buddy them up with the residents from our local retirement village. We also realised that it was important for the Year 6s to buddy up with the staff members, so each staff member now has a buddy from Year 6.

Extending our buddy system was not the only action we made. Every week, the Student Action Team now has a column in the newsletter and writes about a different value each week, which gives parents an understanding about values. We are also handing out certificates at assembly to the students and staff at St Charles to recognise when they are putting the values into action.

St Kevin's Primary School

At St Kevin's, our value we are focusing on is 'care and compassion'. After attending the forum together, we discussed what action we wanted to put in place at our school. We met with Mrs Petkovic to talk about our ideas. We decided that we would concentrate on the value of care and compassion.

We thought it would be a good idea to help children at our school if they had problems with their friends in the playground. We decided to be 'go to' people. This is peer mediation, and is when a group of children help others.

We created a timeline of what actions we would need to achieve, and when we would achieve them. We created a chart.

We wrote about the action we wanted to focus on, and what we would need. For example, we needed to wear brightly coloured vests and lanyards with the questions we would ask children when they had problems.

We met with our Principal, Mrs Miers, to discuss our plans. She helped us to put our action into place. We presented a slide show at our assembly where we told all the teachers and kids about our plans.

We are ready to be the 'go to' people in the playground. Teachers will train us to deal with problems. Then we will be ready. We will have rosters so we can rotate between play and lunch.

St Gregory the Great Primary School

St Gregory's researched the values of 'respect', 'honesty and trustworthiness' and 'doing your best' and we found that respect was lacking. So at St Gregory's, our Values Education action is Manners Week, based on the value of respect.

To try and improve respect, we have put up posters, spoken at assembly and at a staff meeting twice, and have also made a book and a role play for the Preps and Grade 1s.

For Manners Week we are rewarding one person from each class for trying their best to show respect to their classmates and friends. We intend to have Manners Week each term. By doing this, St Gregory's is hoping to improve its students' attitude and to educate their lifestyle.

SS Peter and Paul's Primary School

At Ss Peter and Paul's, East Doncaster, our values have been 'responsibility', 'doing your best' and 'respect'. We decided to focus on 'respect' for our actions.

Some of the things we have done are:

- We wrote to the Premier, Steve Bracks, and received a letter back from him showing all his support;
- We attended Manningham Promoting Character Annual General Meeting and told them about this wonderful project and got to sit in big chairs at the Council;
- We informed the school about the SAT project at school assemblies;
- We wrote the lyrics and performed a song about respect for the whole school;
- We made posters for each classroom about respect;
- We wrote and illustrated a picture story about respect for the Juniors;
- We performed plays for each class telling them about respect, responsibility and doing your best;
- We made badges for each class for teachers to award to the "most respectful student of the week".

We are going to continue working in our Student Action Team to help all the people in our school be better people by showing good values.

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