

Values Education School Forum

Undera Primary School

Undera is a small rural community, north-west of Shepparton. Most of the students who attend the primary school are the sons and daughters of dairy farmers. As everyone is increasingly aware, the impact of the current drought is causing hardship among rural communities. At Undera the impact is direct and is causing financial and emotional hardship.

The Values Education School Forum at Undera Primary School complemented our Garden Science Project. This is centred on students growing vegetables with assistance in our specially developed garden. Every Friday we have activities facilitated by the Garden Science Project teachers: Kate (qualified teacher), Debbie (parent and qualified horticulturalist) and Lindy (ex-parent and member of Landcare). Financial assistance comes from the school budget and from money the group generates through the fresh produce market which occurs on the last day of each term. Students operate the stall on the market day, sell the produce and count the money. The Garden Science Group uses the money to purchase other plants or items they need. Students are also involved in 'Wish list'.

The Garden Science Project has been a useful way to promote learning in terms of VELS Science (photosynthesis), English (writing recipes and safety rules), Mathematics (measurement in kilograms, grams and centimetres and metres), and also Civics and Citizenship.

The school also holds grandparent events where grandparents work in the garden with the students. This has been a great way to foster relationships between students and older members of our community. The informal discussions that were part of these interactions encouraged thinking about values and included topics such as 'What does it mean to be a good person', 'Dealing with hardships in a rural environment (then and now)', 'Good times and bad times (then and now)'. Plenty of humour also made its way into the discussions, with tall tales of fishing trips and snakes.

Prior to holding the Values Education School Forum, funded by the Australian Government, discussion was facilitated by having a meeting with all those attending. Topics for discussion were set and everyone reminded of the importance of a positive tone to the day.

The whole community shared a meal at the forum prepared by the school. We used the in-season tomatoes, cucumbers, snake beans, eggplants and lettuces from the school garden in salads and as ingredients for the pasta sauce. The forum was another link to relationships that had been previously formed at the grandparent events and was a real bonus in the current economic and social climate.

Relationship-building can be very important to small communities; however, without a designated purpose people can be hesitant to discuss personal beliefs or experiences. They may not realise the powerful impact that a conversation between a 10- year-old and a 70-year-old can have. The forum allowed the sharing of wonderful stories and positive discussion which otherwise may not have happened. Everyone in the community has lived through major droughts in the past. They know the way drought can erode self-confidence and self-esteem

in rural people, and yet people can show the way, in terms of resilience, through authentic stories and empathy.

Since the forum, there has been ongoing discussion and reflection on what a 'good member of the Undera community' is and how students can be good members of the community by acting in certain ways.

Dave Farrell,
Principal
Undera Primary School
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