

The Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 1

The following has been extracted from *Implementing the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools: Report of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 1: Final Report September 2006*.

<http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/default.asp?id=16381>

Connecting to the community

Engaging the school community in values education and the development of young people as productive citizens and contributors to society was pursued by five clusters of schools.

A community approach to values education and home–school consistency

Building on prior work, the Merrylands Cluster (NSW) identified commonalities and differences between school community stakeholders as a means of working towards a more consistent whole school, and also home and school, approach to developing students' social skills.

Merrylands Cluster, New South Wales

Cluster coordinator: Belinda Guidice, Merrylands High School

Participating schools:

- Guildford Public School
- Guildford West Public School
- Hilltop Road Public School
- Merrylands East Public School
- Merrylands High School
- Merrylands Public School
- Sherwood Grange Public School

UAN critical friend: Dr John De Nobile, Macquarie University, NSW

Values in Action: Our Community Counts, undertaken by the culturally diverse seven schools in the Merrylands Cluster, sought to build on work the school communities already had done by identifying commonalities and differences between teachers, parents and students as a means of working towards a more consistent whole school, and also home and school, approach.

More specifically, a core team of student leaders, parents and staff from cluster school communities worked collaboratively to develop a common set of values to reflect the National Framework values and the NSW Department of Education *Implementing the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools: Report of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 1: Final Report September 2006*

and Training's core values as well as school community beliefs. This was achieved through a concentrated, simultaneous focus on school ethos and governance on the one hand, and student social skills on the other.

School governance was reviewed to ensure 'alignment, consistency and integration' of the sets of values and beliefs referred to across all cluster schools. Central to this was the collection of survey data on different community stakeholders' views, using such instruments as the following questionnaire (Figure 31) for parents, which was anonymously completed at workshops, and which was complemented by similar questionnaires for students and staff.

Figure 31: Questionnaire on values in the school community

Please indicate how well you understand the following ideas by circling a number from 1 to 5, where: 1 = I don't know what this means; and 5 = I understand this very well	
1. Care	1 2 3 4 5
2. Personal Best	1 2 3 4 5
3. Honesty	1 2 3 4 5
4. Respect	1 2 3 4 5
5. Responsibility	1 2 3 4 5
6. Tolerance	1 2 3 4 5
Please rate the extent to which you agree that each statement below is true by circling a number from 1 to 5. Circle one number only for each statement. 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Undecided; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree	
1. My child assists other students when s/he can.	1 2 3 4 5
2. There have been times when other students have shown concern for my child	1 2 3 4 5
3. It is important to aim for excellence.	1 2 3 4 5
4. My child always does the best s/he can.	1 2 3 4 5
5. I think everyone should be treated equally.	1 2 3 4 5
6. Everyone in this school community gets a fair go.	1 2 3 4 5
7. My child will stand up for other students.	1 2 3 4 5
8. I know that someone at this school would help me if my child was being bullied or denied her/his rights.	1 2 3 4 5
9. Students at this school are honest with one another.	1 2 3 4 5
10. Students at this school should act according to how they feel.	1 2 3 4 5
11. Students at this school show respect to people.	1 2 3 4 5
12. My child is courteous and well mannered to other students.	1 2 3 4 5
13. My child is courteous and well mannered to teachers.	1 2 3 4 5
14. My child is aware of how his/her behaviour impacts on others.	1 2 3 4 5
15. My child gets involved with/helps the school community.	1 2 3 4 5
16. My child gets along with students who are different to them.	1 2 3 4 5
17. My child has a good relationship with the teachers.	1 2 3 4 5

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18. My child can learn valuable things from other cultures.	1 2 3 4 5
19. No particular ethnic groups are excluded at this school.	1 2 3 4 5
20. My child resolves conflicts with students without fighting.	1 2 3 4 5
21. I know what the main beliefs of this school are.	1 2 3 4 5
22. The values of this school and those of my family are similar.	1 2 3 4 5

The project's efforts to develop students' ability to act responsibly in and beyond school focused on building their social and behavioural skills through programmes and policies reflecting 'responsibility, respect and right choice'. Students in this context were taught to act on core values by 'developing and demonstrating skills in effective communication, problem solving, decision making and active listening; and by repeatedly practising these behaviours ... both at school and at home'.

An important strategy in this regard, again primarily used in a workshop context, was to get stakeholders to imagine what the core values actually might look like, both in the community as a whole and in class. An indication of the outcomes of this process is evident in the example in Figure 32, developed by one group for the value of Respect.

Figure 32: The meaning of Respect

In school communities what might this value look like?

- Showing good manners
- No bullying
- Not being racist (among students and between teachers and students)
- Consideration for all cultures (cooperating with)
- Being accepting of diversity/difference (eg multicultural, disabilities, students with special needs)
- Looking after property (eg no graffiti, not damaging school property, school gardens)
- Following the core beliefs and values of our school
- Maintaining Code of Behaviour/Conduct in all settings
- During meetings, all stakeholders (staff, students, parents) being listened to
- Parents and teachers supporting each other

In classrooms what might this value look like?

- Respect yourself – value the contributions you make during class
- Not talking over each other
- Using appropriate/acceptable (in terms of school, home) language
- Being considerate of everyone's right to learn in their own time
- Treat people how you would like to be treated in return
- Respecting each other's property (eg not stealing hats, pens)
- Listening to each other's views
- Following school/teacher's/class rules
- Using appropriate language
- Students (and teacher and students) getting along together – includes boys/girls working together and people from different cultures working together
- Not being sexist, racist or bullying others
- Modelling manners

The linking of social skills to developing a common ethos and language of values, and being consistent in both word and deed, derives from the view, as the cluster coordinator put it, that

[i]t is not enough to merely 'teach values' (ie what they are and what they look like). It is imperative that students be given the opportunity to explore their personal values system – looking at who and what has influenced it? And why? How their value system has changed and may change again in the future? And for them to look at the

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choices they make and the choices other people make in terms of values. Most importantly, though, students must be given the chance to demonstrate values in practice. This will enable them ... [to develop] the skills to critically reflect on their actions and develop self-knowledge ...

Modelling by the school community and structures is one of the most powerful lessons in values education.

This in turn required each school to adopt a whole school approach along the lines that the high school in the cluster, for example, used. In early 2005, the principal of that school discussed the Good Practice Schools Project Stage 1 submission with the school's student welfare coordinators to consolidate work they already had done in the area of values education, student leadership and to develop cluster relations with their local primary schools. As such, the programme of activity in this school was not limited to 'values' alone, but also encompassed work already underway on MindMatters, student welfare programmes, anti-bullying and more.

It was hardly surprising, then, that the school decided a whole school approach was required. The core team for the project it established therefore included staff from varying key learning areas, active and well respected parents and community leaders, and student leaders from Years 7–12. In particular, all students were given the opportunity to be involved in the project, with six from each year group selected for formal involvement based on 'recommendations by the Year Advisor, SRC Advisor, Peer Support Coordinator, Peer Mediation Coordinator, the Principal and other relevant staff'. In addition, the SRC took a major role in the project, building on cluster initiatives already underway with a values base.

A particular highlight of activity in this context was the design and implementation of values forums by student leaders across the six partner schools. More specifically:

- Student leaders designed a workshop presentation to bring values to the surface and increase student understanding of the values present in our society. This presentation was workshopped in a variety of ways, including:
 - an introductory discussion using open-ended questions such as 'What are values? What do you value? Who influences your values and why? Are your values the same as our school? Why? Give examples of when you have demonstrated positive and negative values? What motivated you to do this? Why?';
 - the students then being shown still pictures and video snippets of the *Simpsons* television show to increase their understanding of positive and negative values being displayed by the characters. This provided them with the opportunity to explore and discuss core values and the impact decisions have on the individual, others and society as a whole;

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- students working individually to prioritise values from most to least important, conducted as a cut and paste activity. They discussed their priorities in small groups and then as a class to determine their school's values. Students had to put forward reasons and critically analyse their value system to determine a common set. This was done until an agreed school set was achieved.
- This in turn enabled the cluster core team to develop core values to apply across the seven school communities comprising the values of Respect, Responsibility, Personal Best, Care, Honesty and Tolerance; and the students subsequently led values education presentations at both the regional and state level in New South Wales.

The development of agreed values in the communities subsequently has allowed the core team to move to writing curriculum-based material for Year 7 in particular so it can be used in the orientation of new students to high school. This material comprises six 40-minute sessions per class, with a focus on two related values in each. Once again the *Simpsons* will provide a vehicle for looking at the values, underpinning class discussions and scenarios reflecting everyday student experiences at school and at home. Students will then undertake a series of activities such as making posters that reflect the values, creating an advertisement and taking these ideas to develop a mural for the school.

Once this basic awareness-raising programme has been undertaken by the school, specific curriculum implementation will occur through targeted key learning areas such as the use of a unit on accepting ourselves and others in Personal Development, Health and Physical Education and an Arts unit on mural design.

This also has been complemented by the work in partner primary schools, such as one school's development of an explicit values unit of work for Year 6 students to 'build the field for Year 7'. This unit, delivered to two classes for the first time in Term 4, 2005, built on the anti-bullying priority of the school, covered issues of 'friendship, friends or foes?', responsibility, honesty, determination and respect over a period of six weeks.

An evaluation of the experience demonstrated that it fits well with the overall approach of the school, though there was some concern among staff about the use of a unit when their time plan for teaching in the semester already had been set. This mirrors a high school concern about timetabling issues as well, where teachers noted that implementing sessions for Year 7 students 'resulted in them not being able to teach their timetabled classes ... especially at the beginning of the year, as that is when you are wanting to make positive impressions and set expectations and consistent guidelines for behaviour, etc'.

This only emphasises the importance of values education being integrated to teaching and learning programmes as a whole, rather than being seen as, what one of the cluster primary schools referred to as, an 'add on'.

Time, it must be noted in this context, was a concern to all the cluster schools as it was to schools in virtually all the Good Practice Schools Project clusters; both in terms of the time for the project to make a difference and the time for teachers and others to do the work. In essence the cluster was concerned, as one of its constituent primary schools put it, that 'they would not make effective change within one year'. To some extent, this was dealt with by the schools through a combination of:

- making links wherever possible to other relevant priorities and initiatives underway;
- using project funding in part to create opportunities for time;
- being realistic about what could be achieved in the time frame;
- re-evaluating the project aims along the way to adjust them as required.

Yet even in only a short time frame, the achievements have been notable indeed, with the high school at least pointing to outcomes that, in its own words, include:

- *increased professional dialogue among staff and increased values education awareness through professional learning opportunities through the project;*
- *increased relationship building between [the] High School and partner primary schools and other members of the school community;*
- *the development of a common values language (meta language) within the school community (particularly staff and students);*
- *increased understanding of values by students and the ability for students to articulate values;*
- *an increase in staff reflection about teacher practice and relationship building between staff and students;*
- *increased student leadership opportunities;*
- *increased modelling of values by staff and students.*

Many of these achievements have been replicated in the partner primary schools as well; with one, somewhat against the trend perhaps, noting achievements beyond those anticipated, primarily because of the values-based work it previously had done. This centred, the school explained, on a clear set of 'high five values' at the school which it exemplified in the following way, as determined by the students themselves:

- *Respect – don't answer back; don't backchat; be friendly instead of nasty; help someone if they are hurt; doing what someone asks you to do; listen to people; let others join in; and looking after other people's property.*

- *Responsibility – being positive; making good choices; and having intelligence to choose wisely.*
- *Cooperation – working together and helping each other; being friendly so you can work as a team; being kind and respecting each other; making up with friends, saying sorry and setting aside differences so you can share and help each other; and taking part in group activities.*
- *Pride – having high standards; doing your best; taking care and thinking some things are important; being happy with your work and yourself; and being good.*
- *Trust – don't lie; be honest and tell the truth; believe someone; be loyal; and trust is not breaking a promise.*

More common was the experience of another cluster primary which found that the tasks it set itself were the limit of what it could achieve. These in particular focused on devising a curriculum unit on student leadership and values which was taught to students in Years 5 and 6. This six-week, twenty-lesson unit included a range of activities and required students to develop an interesting mini project on 'someone you should get to know' and a multimedia task on 'leading yourself and others' (Figure 33).

Figure 33: Mini project and multimedia assessment task

Someone you should get to know

- Describe your Project Partner as if you were presenting this person as ‘someone you should get to know’; similar to an advertisement.
- This project can be submitted in any format – eg a poster on cardboard, written booklet, computer poster, computer booklet, PowerPoint® presentation, a public speaking presentation, taped recording, or any other creative idea.
- Consider the following ideas in your description, along with other things you discover during your interview – favourite things; interests and hobbies; things s/he has done; places s/he has travelled; things s/he can do well; prizes s/he has won; places s/he has lived; what s/he hopes for the future; important people s/he has met.
- Instructions:
 1. Select the Project Partner from your rotational group (in class).
 2. Create appropriate interview questions (in class).
 3. Interview the partner to learn all you can about him or her. Take notes while interviewing your partner. Complete the final product in your learning journal (in class).
 4. Plan your project on rough paper (in class).
 5. Complete the project (at home).

The total mark for the project is out of 20. A mark of 10 will be allocated for the quality of the description and information you discover about your Project Partner; 5 for the presentation of the project; and 5 for creativity and effort.

Leading yourself and others

Students’ multimedia presentations must provide information about the qualities they possess, qualities they need to develop, their leadership qualities, roles and responsibilities in a variety of situations, and reflection on the learning experiences of this unit. The presentation must consist of text, images, tables, animation and music.

[Marking criteria (not described in depth for the purpose of this report) relate to an ongoing student learning journal, the presentation, talking and listening in class and peer evaluation and feedback.]

The teaching of this unit, along with the broader community values sharing exercises and values-related focus on student wellbeing has, the school explained, resulted in observable improvements in behaviour (reflected in fewer behaviour
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incident referrals from students involved), which is mirrored by the project experiences of other cluster schools.

It is an experience that sits behind the advice the cluster would provide to other schools and teachers which one of the constituent primary schools typically put in the following terms:

- *A whole school approach is essential*
- *Values education is a really good platform to realign whole school policies.*
- *A central team is need – for sustainability purposes and sharing expertise among colleagues.*
- *Ensure that consistency is applied and that **your** school's needs are met.*

To which another of the schools involved would add, 'listen to your stakeholders (parents, students and staff) to tap into the expertise and knowledge of your school community'. That arguably is why the school has managed to get the sort of commonality of values and approach that led one of its parents to observe

... how important it is to know that the school is continuing and reinforcing the work that I do at home with my kids in terms of values. It is good to know that my child goes to a school that models and values the same things that I model at home.

Key messages

1. Schools should not limit their focus to the nine values in the National Framework, but should reflect on the guiding principles and key elements that inform good practice as well.
2. Developing a shared set of values between home and the school helps reinforce positive values in the school community and ensure that real community concerns and needs are met.
3. Schools should consciously seek to improve student skills in effective communication, problem solving, decision making and active listening, and to reinforce their connectedness to both school and home. It is important in this context to identify and/or create opportunities for students to act responsibly in a range of active and passive ways within and beyond the school environment.
4. Staff need professional development in learning strategies and pedagogy that demonstrate the incorporation of values into their curriculum. The importance of such professional development to build teaching capacity cannot be underestimated.

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5. Working collaboratively as a cluster cannot be taken for granted, but requires a high level of commitment from all of the schools involved. A core team of student leaders, parents and staff can help generate such commitment and ensure cluster success.