

# The Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2 cluster project synopses

The following has been extracted from *At the Heart of What We Do: Values Education at the Centre of Schooling – The Final Report of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2, August 2008*.

[http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/val\\_vegps2\\_final\\_report,26142.html](http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/val_vegps2_final_report,26142.html)

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## **EASTERN GOLDFIELDS CLUSTER**

Western Australia

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### Attributes of an Aussie

**Cluster coordinator:** Amy Palmer, Eastern Goldfields College

#### **Participating schools:**

- Eastern Goldfields College
- South Kalgoorlie Primary School

**UAN critical friend:** Dr Alan Pritchard, University of Western Australia, Western Australia

#### **Key messages**

1. Classroom management strategies that focus on highlighting positive behaviours in a values context lead to improved relationships between students and students and students and teachers.
2. Values education approaches such as teachers mentoring students who in turn mentor younger students create supportive and safer school environments.
3. When a critical mass of school staff commit to improvements and undertake targeted professional learning in values education, they can create successful and sustainable values education practices over time that have direct and positive impact on students.

In **Attributes of an Aussie**, Eastern Goldfields sought to develop emotional literacy to help students to value commitment, empathy and personal responsibility. The schools developed two strategies to address their purpose: mentoring (peer support) and restorative justice. The mentoring program specifically addressed the values of inclusivity, care and compassion, respect and responsibility.

Baseline data gathered at the outset of the project indicated a need for both schools to implement strategies to address the values of respect, responsibility and understanding, tolerance and inclusion. At Eastern Goldfields College, for instance, a greater number of enrolments of at-risk students raised concern about increased behaviour incidents. The Behaviour Management in Schools Plan was outdated and punitive in its nature. In a new context of increased enrolment of at-risk students, a working party identified the need to review the Behaviour Management Plan and consider conflict resolution skills that would assist students in developing and strengthening communication skills. In addition to this it was identified that the behaviour had to be viewed in the context of teaching and learning and the manner in which students were engaged at school.

At Kalgoorlie South Primary School, discussions between staff and parents saw the development of a number of complementary projects to develop and strengthen relationships both within classes and in the wider school community.

The peer support approach involved an integrated multilevel peer support program as follows:  
Staff at Eastern Goldfields College trained Year 11 students.  
Thirty Year 11 and 12 students trained Grade 7 (South Kalgoorlie Primary School) students.  
Twenty Grade 7 students then trained Grade 3 and 4 students at the primary school.

This cascading 'train the trainer' program was delivered by two experienced facilitators, supported by a peer support consultant.

The explicit teaching of values became a major aspect of the project. Students participated in a variety of activities that required them to explore their own values and the values of others. Staff members across the college used the 'Values

across the Curriculum' resources to embed values-focused activities into each learning area of the curriculum. Each classroom in the college displayed a set of values posters that highlighted the values of respect, responsibility and understanding, tolerance and inclusion. South Kalgoorlie Primary School also explicitly taught values in all years of schooling.

The peer support program was used as a model to develop a program tailored to the specific needs of the students in both of the schools involved in the project. The basic organisational structures of the peer support program were used; however, much of the content was revised to reflect the goals of the project.

Students reported a range of learnings from their participation in the peer support program. They included:

Through the different activities I have realised that everyone's ideas should be acknowledged and everyone should be treated with respect.

It [peer support] gave me a better understanding of how to understand other people's views and beliefs. Before, I wasn't very tolerant.

Some of the Year 11 leaders' comments included:

A boy in my group and his friends used to fight a lot at the start. One session they were fighting when another boy said, 'Stop it! Haven't you been listening to any of this.' They stopped.

One Year 7 believed that the world would be boring without bullies. We challenged that view ... In the end she was listening more and was starting to be more tolerant of others.

From the Year 7 students:

Older students aren't like teachers. We can say things we mightn't say to teachers [about a problem] and that helps.

I really learnt that bullying isn't much fun.

The restorative justice component of the project assisted students to resolve high level conflict. The UAN report noted one of the strengths of the program was the empowering nature of students working with and helping other students in a values-based framework. As he said:

The program is an excellent example of cross-school cooperation. It won an Excellence In Education award presented to both schools by the State Minister of Education. An interesting spin-off of the program is the leadership development of students in both schools and the conscious growth in awareness of the importance of

role-modelling across almost all of the student leaders in both schools.

Classroom Management Strategies is a formal program based around five days of professional development, with peer support and peer feedback, and focused at a classroom level. It emphasises positive communication and the building of respect through positive relationships. Over 60 per cent of college staff was trained in applying this program in their classroom. By virtue of the numbers of staff involved, a common values language was established for the whole school community.

Cooperative Learning Strategies is based on five principles:

- positive interdependence
- individual accountability
- face-to-face interaction
- social skills
- evaluation of the social skills goal and academic goal set in each lesson or group of lessons.

There are over 100 specific strategies; teacher professional development might start with three or

four strategies, with more added as the teacher gains familiarity and confidence.

Explicitly teaching values in the cluster schools included the display of colourful stimulus posters. As has been mentioned in a number of cluster reports, these posters encouraged discussion, and gave teachers a common language around which to focus values approaches. An episode reported in a teacher's case writing gives a sense of what was accomplished:

An experienced teacher, who had experienced difficulties with a tough class, trialled these cooperative strategies with the support of other staff. At the end of the course he placed three columns on the whiteboard and asked students to work in three groups to comment on what they had learnt this semester. He then left the room and waited outside, expecting on his return to see factual comments written. What he found were the following comments written: 'We learnt manners, we learnt how to work in groups and the many different ways to work in groups, we learnt time management, we learnt how to speak to each other, we learnt how to respect people, we learnt how to generate ideas, we learnt how to sink or swim together, to learn manners to get replies, and how to get along with people we normally wouldn't get along with, if you respect people you get attention and we learnt how to value each other more.'