

# 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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## UNITY IN DIVERSITY IN SOUTH WESTERN SYDNEY

New South Wales

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### Building Cultural Bridges

**Cluster coordinators:** Pinad El-Ahmad, Malek Fahd Islamic School and Catherine Ryan, Punchbowl Public School

#### Participating schools:

- Malek Fahd Islamic School
- Arkana College
- Caringbah High School
- Cronulla South Public School
- Punchbowl Boys High School
- Punchbowl Public School

**UAN critical friend:** Dr Carol Reid, University of Western Sydney, New South Wales

#### Key messages

- 1 Values education approaches provide a common ground for diverse communities to negotiate what they have in common through a lens of democracy, dialogue and shared action.
- 2 Information and communication technologies provide a space where stereotypes and myths about cultures can be challenged through person-to-person online communications.
- 3 Clusters of schools can be brought together to address a perceived problem by using a range of values-driven activities in ways that provide for long-term and sustainable change. Once relationships are established, ongoing conversations can continually loop back to values education and build on shared new learning.
- 4 Parents play a vital role in legitimising and supporting values education approaches across cultures. When students see the bonds of friendship developing between adults, the power of this active role modelling encourages them to move beyond racial and cultural stereotypes towards greater intercultural understandings.

The Unity in Diversity cluster came together as a result of the Cronulla race riots. The main purpose of the **Building Cultural Bridges** project was to build relationships between groups in the cluster's community to improve respect for individual identities and respect for other cultures. The cluster focused on the values identified in the *National Framework* to resolve conflict and build positive futures for the whole community. As the UAN adviser for the cluster observed:

Values education ... is understood here as being central to cultural negotiation, which this cluster has been attempting to unpick through the lens of democracy, dialogue and action ... this is because a democratic and dialogic approach was necessary at the level of school staff to overcome considerable emotional effects generated by the Cronulla riot ... One of the outcomes, revealed in focus groups with parents and students at the end of the project, is that fear was central. Given this, one of the key aims became geographic; to have students work together on each other's turf on projects of mutual benefit, that in and of themselves provided the scaffolding for clarification of values.

This notion of place- and space-based racial divides was a starting point for project activity. Project activity was based around four places and spaces: beach space, virtual space, environmental space and cosmopolitan space. The centrality of beach life in Sydney cannot be underestimated. Public transport is linked to few beaches in the Sydney metropolitan region, and Cronulla is one of them.

At a cluster level, five main activities involved all the schools: the Beach Awareness Course, a collaborative website, the Bankstown forum, the Tree Troopers and Gunamatta Bay – A Silent Conversation. A showcase of values education at the Sutherland Shire Community Hall was a culminating event.

In the Beach Awareness Course four schools spent the day on the beach. The beach provided an iconic Australian common space through which values could be mediated. The cluster coordinator saw the activity in the following way:

The first thing our schools did together was go to Cronulla beach for a beach awareness day. This was a fantastic opportunity for students from Cronulla, Punchbowl and [the] Muslim [schools] to meet for the first time. They were able to learn about the beach and how to be responsible at the beach together. This was a really good way of supporting the values our cluster focused on. It was also a really positive way for students, because it made them see how much they had in common with one another. In this particular activity the students shared

learning in that they learnt that being responsible and respectful on the beach was in the common interest of all who want to enjoy the beach. It was also the first step in our cluster in teaching self-awareness as well as awareness of others and in that respect students owned the learning as well.

The collaborative website was an intranet website where students could visit one another online and discuss impressions of activities and other issues that interested them. The virtual space encouraged students to challenge stereotypes being presented in the mainstream media. Importantly, the work connected with their lived experiences rather than the more disconnected reports they were reading in the media. As one student said:

I learnt that everyone thinks in different ways ... I also learnt that no matter how different a person is you can learn to cooperate with them.

The cluster UAN members and university students from the University of Western Sydney assisted with the development of the website.

The cosmopolitan space of the Bankstown Civic Centre was the location for the Bankstown forum, which brought students together to understand self and others. Students explored their personal, social and cultural identities through music, dance, art, story writing, drama and photography. The values that emerged from this gathering were understanding, tolerance, inclusion and respect. As the UAN adviser shared:

During the day, one of the activities most enthused about was the informal and spontaneous handball tournament that developed at lunchtime while waiting for the lunch to arrive. This reminds us that friendship among children can emerge in the sometimes tiny spaces of shared fun.

The environmental space project was known as Tree Troopers. Tree Trooper day was an environmental program run by Bankstown Council. The activity was designed to raise awareness about local environmental issues and the way they articulate with national and global issues. The program also enhanced responsible active citizenship. The Tree Trooper activity was held near Punchbowl Boys High School.

Gunamatta Bay – Crossing the Bridge, A Silent Conversation was a forum held in conjunction with Gymea High School at Gunnamatta Bay. The purpose of the forum was to provide an environment in which students could reflect on

values at a deeper level. Up until this forum there was concern that student interactions, conversations and activities were at a level that may not have overtly promoted reflection on values and how they integrate with real-life, everyday experiences. It is important to recognise that the initial forums and activities stimulated student engagement and connection with lived experiences such as the beach context and cultural diversity associated with the Cronulla riots.

The Gunnamatta Bay forum provided the cluster with insights into how students, parents, teachers and members of the community felt about and related to particular values.

Students engaged in a range of activities which later fed into the 'conversations' activity. This was facilitated by University of Western Sydney students who had been trained to conduct focus groups with students in each activity as well as with parents and teachers. The questions asked were: 'What makes you Australian?' and 'What does it mean to be Australian?' The focus groups enabled participants to share their views and explore the focus values in the context of their personal beliefs and identity.

As a consequence of involvement in the project, teachers report that they are using a common and explicit values language; that relationships have improved between students, and students are generally exercising better self-discipline and have a more genuine regard for each other. Students are

better able to articulate the effect their behaviour has on others.

The cluster has also seen some changes in the students who have taken part in the values education interschool activities. Student reflections from Punchbowl Public School after the Bankstown forum show various positive responses to the values activities:

During the day I met a girl from Cronulla Sth and another from Arkana College who were friendly and funny in the Teamwork session. I also met up with my cousin who attends Arkana College. I later met two girls from Malek Fahd and another from Cronulla Sth who were friendly. I found that we all liked similar things and laughed at the same things no matter where we came from! It was great meeting people and finding we are same.

I got to know new people at the forum. While some had a different religion to me and went to different schools we were alike in other ways. We had similar ideas, we said the same things, enjoyed the same food and drink. I also got to know their friends and they met mine.

Another noteworthy outcome from the Unity in Diversity cluster reflected upon by the cluster coordinator was that teachers in the cluster seem to be taking a greater interest in values education as a way to frame the content they teach and the way they teach it. At Malek Fahd Islamic School, for example, programs in the primary school and the high school history, society and the environment faculty have been redeveloped to incorporate values into content by building on citizenship activities. In the primary schools, the values have become a planning framework for curriculum and individual units of work.