

Co-curricular activity

Student leadership and values education – Making the link: Merrylands High School, representing the Merrylands Cluster

A practical look at what student leaders can do to enhance values education practices across their school and wider community

Year levels

Middle Childhood – Later Adolescence

Values for Australian Schooling

- Care and compassion
- Doing your best
- Fair go
- Freedom
- Honesty and trustworthiness
- Integrity
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Understanding, tolerance and inclusion

Key learning areas

Extra-curricular – student leadership

School profile

Merrylands HS is a comprehensive high school in south-western Sydney with approximately 800 students. NESB contributions are 64% and over 50 cultures are represented. School priorities are Quality Teaching, school community wellbeing and building school community leadership capacity.

Reason for co-curricular activity

Student leaders at Merrylands HS are highly respected school leaders. The SRC comprises 60 students, reflective of the school profile (NESB, gender equity and so on). Leadership extends these barriers and students are provided with formal leadership opportunities including Peer Support, Peer Mediation, Peer Tutoring and Young Leaders (a Boys Education initiative). In addition, opportunities are provided in the area of culture, sport and citizenship and we work closely with students from six of our partner public primary schools.

Through our participation in Values Education Good Practice Schools Stage 1 (VEGPS1), the Merrylands cluster wanted values education to be 'brought to the surface' – where values could be commonly understood and articulated between staff, students and parents across our seven school communities.

Merrylands HS student leaders worked with students, staff and parents from our partner public schools to enhance understanding of values-rich practices across our schools. Below are examples of how student leaders have positively impacted on values education across our schools.

Implementation and development

Student leaders have designed, implemented and evaluated some of the activities including the following:

Get an understanding about what students know about values

This can be achieved through collecting base-line data (ie survey), through focus group discussions (random selection of students) or making a DVD (filming students' responses to questions with no preparation time).

Get students to think/critically analyse their own values system –

A good workshop to run may include asking the following questions:

- What are values?
- What values are important to you? Why?
- Who/what influences your values system?
- Have your values systems changed over time?

Introduce students to the National Framework (*National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools, Commonwealth of Australia, 2005*) and relevant State/Territory documentation

The document for us was the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) Values Policy (2004)). We worked with NSW DET personnel and we looked at what each core value might look like in our classrooms, across our school community and from a student leadership perspective. We looked at what enacting each core value might involve.

Run values forums for students, staff and parents across your school/cluster

For us, this included brainstorming the meaning of values, looking at the NSW approach to values education, looking at the National Framework, running a group work activity on what each value looks like, using stills and clips from 'The Simpsons' to enhance understanding. The forum concluded with a prioritising activity to establish our school's core values (we did this individually → pair → small group → class/school). The core values that our cluster established were: *Respect, Responsibility, Personal Best, Care, Tolerance and Honesty.*

Think about what goes on in each of your classrooms?

Student leaders identified the evident link between Values Education and Quality Teaching. We had students examine:

- *subject content* (ie What specific content do we learn in class that is values related?);
- *classroom dynamics* (ie What is happening in our classrooms? Is respect, fairness, and personal best being shown by students? teachers?); and
- *skills* (ie What skills are we learning that improve our values education practices?) Skills such as communication, active listening, group work etc were identified.

Move students from 'knowing the good' to 'doing the good'

Encourage activities such as being good role models, trying your best in class, becoming Peer Support leaders, Peer Mediators etc. Have students critically analyze questions such as 'If we know the difference between right and wrong, why do we sometimes not choose to do the "right" thing?'

Create a school culture based on values

This, for our cluster, included designing activities based around the philosophy of Respect, Responsibility and Right Choice. Student leaders designed workshops and created a multimedia presentation that they articulated to the student body.

Outcomes

- Greater understanding of values across our school communities – students' intellectual depth has increased, so, too, has their ability to communicate, reflect, and self-manage.
- Greater articulation of values across our school communities – values have been 'brought to the surface' and a common dialogue is shared and clearly understood by staff, students and parents.
- Student leaders have consistently modelled positive values practices.
- Students have had the opportunity to critically analyse, and continue to develop, their own personal values system; they have also had the opportunity to demonstrate positive values – through activities both at school and at home.