

Co-curricular activity

Surf Awareness – Being safe at the beach: Unity in Diversity Cluster

Students from Punchbowl Public School, Malek Fahd Islamic School and Cronulla South Public School travelled to Cronulla Beach to participate in a series of workshops conducted by lifesavers from the Cronulla Surf Club to teach safety at the beach. Students from Punchbowl Boys' High School, who had qualified as surf- lifesavers as part of the 'On the Same Wave' project, assisted with the operation of the safety program at Cronulla.

The schools involved chose to jointly conduct the surf awareness activities so that students from culturally diverse backgrounds would be able to develop relationships as they worked together. The assumption was that by working together students will get to know others, find things in common and become more understanding of difference.

The values education focus of the activities were care for self and others, responsibility, respect, and understanding, tolerance and inclusion.

Year levels

Middle childhood (8–11 years)

Later adolescence (16–18 years)

Explicit values focus

- Care and compassion
- Responsibility
- Respect
- Understanding, tolerance and inclusion

Key Learning Areas

- Health and Physical Education
- Studies of Society and Environment

School profiles

'Unity in Diversity' is the name of the Malek Fahd cluster that participated in the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2. Our project used an across-cluster action research approach to devise ways of linking the cluster schools around the notion of cultural understanding and implementing ways of addressing it in classrooms. Schools in the cluster included government and independent high schools and primary schools. The schools in the Bankstown area of south-western Sydney are Punchbowl Boys' High School, a comprehensive boys' school; Punchbowl Public School; and Malek Fahd Islamic School. Those in the Cronulla area are Arkana College and Cronulla South Public School.

The community in the Bankstown area is culturally and linguistically diverse. The majority of the school populations are of Arabic background and are of Muslim faith. The population of the Cronulla area is mainly of Anglo-Celtic, English-speaking background, and are of Christian faith.

Values education at the cluster schools underpins school planning and practice. The values project was one element of a concerted effort by all members of the school communities to improve the educational opportunities for students.

Reason for co-curricular activity

The Surf Awareness program was one of a series of cultural and sporting events organised by the 'Unity in Diversity' south-western Sydney cluster, which crosses the Sutherland and Bankstown local government areas. There is an extraordinary diversity of cultural backgrounds in our communities so our cluster aims to explicitly teach values. Understanding commonality and points of similarity are important for community cohesion.

The beach and lifesavers have iconic significance in Australia, and Cronulla Beach was the setting of conflict in December 2005 when people from our areas clashed in the Cronulla riots. Recent global events have also impacted on some of our students' identities and they feel they have been marginalised within the broader Australian community.

Working with students and community members from Cronulla and Bankstown is intended to broaden students' understanding of themselves and others.

Learning to swim and becoming aware of beach safety are all part of a healthy lifestyle. Some students also come from backgrounds where swimming and beach safety are unfamiliar and this training was to give them more confidence and enjoyment of the beach.

Implementation and development – Drawing everyone together

The Surf Awareness program is run by Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA). Prior to the establishment of the 'Unity in Diversity' cluster, the Surf Awareness program was conducted only at Cronulla South Public School. In 2007, the other schools within the cluster were invited to attend the program and it was conducted at the beach in the Cronulla area and complemented by some theory input at the schools before the students participated in beach activities. Appropriate swimwear for young Muslim girls was designed beforehand and halal food organised for the day.

The lifesavers from Punchbowl Boys' High School who had trained in the 'On the Same Wave' project, also run by SLSA, joined the primary school students for the day to assist as tutors for the activities. 'On the Same Wave' was the recruitment and training of young Australians of Lebanese, Iraqi, Libyan, Jordanian, Palestinian and Egyptian backgrounds in the Surf Life Saving movement. This initiative was organised jointly by the Australian Sports Commission and the Lakemba Sports Club. Students travelled to Cronulla Beach and were trained to the bronze certificate level by the lifesavers at the Cronulla Surf Club. Three students from Punchbowl Boys' High School were among nineteen young people who trained for three months to attain their bronze medallion. As one trainee commented, 'This program was not just about gaining the bronze medallion but also it was about acceptance and what it means to be Australian.'

The Surf Awareness Day

Seventy-five students gathered at Cronulla South Public School for a lesson and film that instructed them about what hazards to look out for at the beach. Students were then divided into three groups which rotated through different activities. Within each group were students from each of the schools that

attended the day. The students had not met prior to this day and by cooperating with each other and learning together they formed relationships.

Students' comments in the follow-up survey of the event reveal that the emphasis on values education on the day meant that students were conscious of their interaction with others. Students said that they had learnt that it was easy to make friends with others, that interaction in this setting was fun and that, although they recognised differences, they were accepting of others.

Activity 1

Students walked along the beach and were taught to identify a rip, and a small, medium and large wave.

The instructor had presented students with this information in the training sessions at school and now the students were able to identify potentially harmful situations in the real setting. Students were taught about how to act safely if they are caught in a rip. The values of respect and responsibility underpinned the activity.

Activity 2

In an ocean pool, students were taught to sit and paddle on a foam board. Some students were not accustomed to swimming and board riding at the beach and this activity was a highlight for the visitors from the Bankstown area. Students were not only having fun as they rode the boards but were also instructed in fundamental board rescue. They also demonstrated care for self and others by helping each other in getting on and off the boards and looking out for those in difficulty.

Activity 3

On the beach students played a game of 'Flags' which is similar to musical chairs. Students lie on their backs in a row about ten metres away from a line of small stakes or flags. There are less flags than students, and the idea is to race to collect the flags after the starter has signalled 'go'. The winner is the student who collects the last remaining flag. This activity acted as a further icebreaker on the day.

At the conclusion of these activities there was a wading session for all students.

Outcomes

- **Care for self and others** was promoted through learning life-saving skills, learning to save themselves and learning to save others.
- **Responsibility** at the beach can be potentially life saving and students' increased awareness of the beach environment is an essential understanding for them so that they act in a safe and responsible manner.
- **Respect** by treating others with regard and consideration was articulated through teamwork. Older students mentored younger students and students from diverse areas met one another to work together.
- **Understanding, tolerance and inclusion** were encouraged through students learning together and from others of diverse backgrounds and ages.

The outcomes of the Surf Awareness program were evaluated in surveys. The responses demonstrated that students gained valuable safety knowledge. They learnt about what to do in a rip: to stay calm, signal, float on their backs and, if they are strong swimmers, to swim diagonally across the rip. They learnt

elementary lifesaving and how to act safely at the beach by knowing the warning signs of dangerous surf conditions.

They also met people from different cultural backgrounds and worked successfully alongside together. They learnt the value of cooperation and respect. Through their new understanding of people from different cultures, they learnt that they shared common ideas and feelings. There was a sentiment of acceptance of difference in the survey results.

For those students who trained as lifesavers, their experience has given them greatly increased confidence. As student leaders they were given the responsibility to tutor younger students and to act as role models for these students. They have joined North Cronulla Surf Club and are rostered to do patrols during the summer.