

Co-curricular activity

Well Being Ambassadors: Port Vincent Primary School

Port Vincent Primary School's Well Being Ambassadors project has empowered students to develop an understanding of values and ways to apply these consistently in school practice. It has encouraged students to recognise and develop cooperation skills, responsibility, resilience and engagement.

Students have led explorations and development of values. This has occurred in partnership with peers, families and community, and has assisted in building values across the whole school and wider community.

Year levels

Middle childhood (8–12 years)

Explicit values focus

- Integrity
- Responsibility
- Respect
- Doing your best

Key Learning Areas

Cross-curricular – student leadership beyond the curriculum, recognising that values are central to all areas of, and in, the curriculum

School profile

Port Vincent Primary School (PVPS) is a small rural school on South Australia's Yorke Peninsula. The school has a current enrolment of 38 students divided into two classes: Junior Primary (Reception–Year 3) and Upper Primary (Years 4–7). The school has a highly supportive community and many volunteers support programs at the school.

Reason for co-curricular activity

The Well Being Ambassadors project emerged from an anti-bullying program introduced to the school by a student who had transferred to Port Vincent. As a trained presenter for this program at her previous school, she was keen to share strategies with her new peers. The program did not 'take off' to her expectations as students at her new, much smaller, school found it hard to relate to some of the scenarios. Although there may be fewer students to be 'friends' with, there is a family atmosphere at Port Vincent and students reported there was not a great deal of bullying.

So, under the new student's leadership and with staff support, the focus changed to a student-centred action research model to investigate 'Why do bullies bully?' Staff and community members explored this question with students and they concluded bullies bully because 'they don't feel good about themselves' and 'they don't care much about others'.

From this finding it was decided to actively promote a focus on wellbeing and use the momentum of interest in the project to examine and develop school and community values.

Implementation and development

The students decided to appoint Well Being Ambassadors to facilitate this process and determined that for a student to be an Ambassador they had to be 'a positive role model', and 'have, and live, qualities that other kids, and the community, values'.¹

Staff also undertook in-service through the 'Bounce Back' program and implemented this into whole school and classroom programs with the assistance of the Well Being Ambassadors.

A whole school review came to the conclusion that a focus and promotion of whole school values would complement the program and strategies from the *National Framework for Values Education in Schools* were adopted. As part of the values education program, Well Being Ambassadors trialled strategies, using graphic organisers, at whole school meetings, and compiled a training manual so they could pass on skills using a 'kids teaching kids' approach. They also received training in strategies to work as peer mediators in line with restorative justice practices. Students have appreciated the opportunity to work through some challenges with peers rather than 'dobbing to teachers'.

Well Being Ambassadors

At the conclusion of a two week introduction to the year, students from the leadership team program are asked to nominate Well Being Ambassadors who are then chosen collectively. As mentioned previously, they are selected for being good role models who are seen to be living their values.

Well Being Ambassadors run whole school meetings each week and are responsible for organising activities designed to enhance values education. At these meetings, issues concerning students are raised and discussed by the school body and achievements are celebrated. At the end of each term they run a 'Stop, Start, Keep, Change' review.

Well Being Ambassadors also take on the role of peer mediators in the schoolyard. One of their roles outside the classroom is to monitor the use of the 'friendship seat'. This seat has been decorated by students and looks welcoming. Students who are feeling lost or left out or who have a problem sit on the seat as an indication they need a friend. It seems to work well and some younger students believe it has 'magical powers'!

In order for new students to feel welcome at the school, Well Being Ambassadors, through the action research approach, also developed a student designed passport. Initially the Ambassadors conducted tours of the school for new students but now a 'buddy' is assigned to this role. New students receive a sticker for their passport at each site visited or when they have learnt something special about PVPS. Students have also created a list of 'Things You Might Want To Know' which includes a list of the school values. In the process of examining school/community values, a student noted 'We don't need rules; we should use our values because they are our rules for living'. It was agreed by the school community that the school values are rules for life and, as such, have replaced

¹ Andrew, April, Ashley, Jesse, Kaylee, WBA (2006)

school rules. These school values are not static but are revisited and reviewed each year.

Well Being Ambassadors also recognise achievements in themselves and others through rewards such as 'lunchbox mail' and certificates. Students have also raised funds for the printing and purchase of 'values' wristbands. Students have to be nominated on a number of occasions before they are awarded a band that summarises a school value. If a student attains five bands representing all five school values, they are presented with a 'Learning for Life' lanyard.

Outcomes

While the student who first initiated the Well Being Ambassadors has now graduated from primary school, she has left a legacy by starting a process that has helped connect school and community with a language of common values and understandings.

The Well Being Ambassadors program is a great example of the power of student voice and how a student initiated program can make a difference on an individual and school community level by developing resilience, leadership and cooperation skills. The program has developed further under the influence of the values education program and, as part of the school culture, it will help ensure values education continues to grow and develop at Port Vincent Primary School.

Values audits undertaken 12 months, and then two years after the values education program commenced concluded:

For parents a major achievement (of the values education program) has been the establishment of different leadership structures within the school such as the Well Being Ambassadors. Parents consider that structures of this nature enable a range of students to be involved as leaders and provide students with the opportunity to live out and action the school's values. As one parent said, 'It gives students confidence and pride in the school'. It also gave the students confidence to see that they were leaders in the community and wider world ... 'There is evidence of a positive, connected understanding of school culture between students/parents/teachers/community...'. Parents believe that the values program is underpinned by a philosophy 'which enables children to grow rather than be controlled'.²

² Values Audit May 2008