“Observations of a Critical Friend”

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The Role of the UAN “Critical Friend”

1. In consultation with Curriculum Corporation to provide, on request, advice to meet the local needs of cluster schools;
2. Support the local cluster schools in the development and implementation of their action research projects in values education;
3. Assist clusters evaluate the effectiveness of their projects by co-ordinating the configurative mapping process;
4. On request, support local cluster schools in developing their final reports on their values education projects.

Characteristics of Good Practice in Relationships between Clusters and Critical Friends

1. A negotiated relationship in which expectations are clarified at the outset
2. Maintenance of regular communication
3. Openness, trust and mutual respect
4. Provision of information in areas of expertise eg on action research
5. Regular feedback, both formal and informal
6. Facilitation of sessions for reflection eg Stop, Look, Listen
7. Attendance at planning sessions and other cluster meetings
8. Assistance in report writing
9. Affirming the work of cluster co-ordinators, teachers and students.

Emerging Issues in Good School Practice

1. Achieving coherence between process and product in good school practice
2. The role of the teacher and the professional growth of cluster and school co-ordinators as members of a learning community
3. Addressing the concrete and abstract in values education
4. Maintaining student commitment and confidence
5. Ensuring shared understandings among cluster members
6. Communication among cluster members, principals, students, critical friends, the Curriculum Corporation
7. Recognizing and valuing differences in approaches to teaching and learning and respecting diversity whilst sustaining co-operation and collaboration
8. Translating and disseminating good practice within and across schools and clusters nationally
9. Maintaining momentum over Xmas and the New Year
10. Ensuring acceptance of good practice in values education in the whole school community, particularly principals, other staff and System authorities
11. Embedding good practice in the life of schools and clusters in the future
12. Identifying further initiatives for the clusters in future collaborative work.

**The Way Forward: Issues and Concerns**

1. Maintaining and strengthening relationships between clusters and critical friends
2. Meeting deadlines for action research, configurative mapping exercises, report writing
3. Maintaining commitment of all participants
4. Enjoying the journey and growing from the experience
5. Ensuring that in our work as educators we are modelling the values for students and members of our school communities more broadly.