Story 1: Teacher story

... I’ve outlined here a whole process of how KidsMatter has helped ... [our] school. But I won’t outline that for brevity’s sake. But with the onset of the values or the VASP project at ... [our] school, the staff saw an opportunity to bind and consolidate the already good work being achieved through KidsMatter with the VASP initiative. Students have responded well to the children’s literature offered by Bounce Back!, addressing specific issues of resilience and emotions, among others, in a simplistic fashion and in an entertaining way through animal characters and those they could easily relate to, in such books such as Green Eggs and Ham and Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge. Lessons are timetabled weekly and in our hectic schedule they can form the basis of literature reviews in English or discussions in religion.

We found though that the nine overarching values of VASP have provided the framework for guiding teacher talk in many school scenarios. The most effective has been our weekly assemblies where each individual value has been simply explained. Here they’ve been given life in Jesus’ stories, and through relevant school yard and classroom examples of behaviour, that accords with each value. While KidsMatter and Bounce Back! literature has been issue specific, eg, bullying, anger, sadness etc, the nine core values have been far reaching and versatile in their application, equipping teachers with the verbal ammunition to deal with the usual morning tea and lunchtime post-mortems of the incidences between rowdy children to classroom arguments over equipment or a lack of doing one’s best.

Funnily enough, as teachers we pride ourselves in the effectiveness of our communications but the ease of imparting the core values and their examples to children has been surprising. The succinct description of each value has facilitated teachers ‘talking the talk’ of values education and highlighting children who are ‘walking the walk’ in using those values much better than before. Children have been noticeably attentive during Monday morning explanations of each value and during awards ceremonies for children being rewarded for utilising the values. They appear to show genuine interest in what value is going to be delineated next and related to what were otherwise confusing concepts because they have been put into the context of the school.

There has been evidence of the flow-on effect from teachers to students who are becoming proficient at using and remembering the language of values. A mother of an ASD child even commented in an IFE meeting that her daughter had remarked that she wasn’t showing care and compassion in the throes of receiving a chastising. Children appear to be more readily able to match theirs and the actions of others to the nine values when outlined by teachers first, for instance, not imposing on one’s freedom by manipulating friendship groups or being the boss of others.

Values talk has been cropping up in lessons even indirectly related to the topic at hand. The ideals of values education appear to be permeating into other KLA’s which is fantastic because we are not Catholic or Christian in distinct areas only. I believe it was when asking children what were the main
parts of a community necessary for people to live together, children immediately began mentioning the nine values, as opposed to the anticipated answers outlining the recreational, residential, industrial and commercial areas of communities. So perhaps the children’s answers were more accurate after all.

Younger children in particular seem to be giving more recognition/acceptance to people with differences. Many children who are on the ASD spectrum at ... [our school] who have always been treated with great tolerance and respect have celebrated a new found pride in their differences. We had a Mary MacKillop competition, and the award recipients, and a little fellow who had a highly commended certificate elaborated upon the importance of acceptance of individuals who are different. A DEEWR consultant commented, and the KidsMatter team agreed, that the most noticeable change in attitude, resilience and values in the long run would probably be in children who are in kindergarten, year 1 at the beginning of the program’s implementation.

I guess the crux of the most significant change for our school is that the person children want to be and are asked to be, one who acts out of the goodness God made them, in is more attainable now and realistic because they’ve been shown how values can be implemented into their own lives. It has been emphasised to children that we’re not just a Catholic school by name at ... [our school].