The Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 1

The following has been extracted from Implementing the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools: Report of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 1: Final Report September 2006.

http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/default.asp?id=16381

Teaching it well

Teaching and learning were the prime focus of the work of the following project cluster.

Teaching through cultural experience

The Indigenous Education Project coordinated by the Birrigai Outdoor School (ACT) enabled secondary students to explore both their own and cultural values as a prelude to teaching their own workshops in primary schools.

Birrigai Outdoor School Cluster, Australian Capital Territory
Cluster coordinators: Mr Stephen White and Ms Sue McMurtrie, Birrigai Outdoor School
Participating schools:
• Alfred Deakin High School
• Birrigai Outdoor School
• Campbell High School
• Caroline Chisholm High School
• Ginninderra District High School
• Lyneham High School
• Melrose High School
• Wanniassa School Senior Campus
UAN critical friend: Dr Thomas Nielsen, University of Canberra, ACT

The Indigenous Education Project coordinated by the Birrigai Outdoor School in the ACT involved students from nine secondary schools exploring both their own and cultural values through a series of workshops and leadership camps as a prelude to teaching their own workshop for students in primary schools.

The personal values teaching included setting tasks for students involved, such as planning and cooking a meal and organising the high rope challenges. Ordinarily such tasks would be arranged and performed by teachers or parents but, in this case, students had complete responsibility with only minimal teacher input.
The focus of the cultural side of the experience did, it must be acknowledged, shift over the course of the project as a result of the sort of logistical problems that any such project can experience. More specifically, the original intention to focus on Ngunnawal cultural traditions and way of life in the region, had to give way to a more general look at traditional Indigenous culture as a reference point for considering the nine national values, due to a change in personnel. Though the local Indigenous community was highly supportive of the project following several earlier successful leadership camps, the key Indigenous contact between Birrigai and the Ngunnawal community, who would teach the students, became unavailable. As the project coordinator at the time was a non-Indigenous person, it was considered inappropriate for him to teach more than a general introduction to the students involved.

Nonetheless, students were exposed to some teaching of Indigenous cultures by Indigenous leaders, which helped emphasise the importance of cultural diversity and history and raised awareness of local Indigenous cultures and the importance of the land. This in turn is reflected in the camp workbooks students compiled which contained such comments, in response to a question about why Indigenous history is important, as:

- People can learn about how people lived with the land and their culture … It is so important to know your heritage.
- Because it is showing respect for the traditional owners of the land to learn about our culture.

It is interesting to note in this context that the National Framework initially was used by the project director, but

… found not to be particularly useful other than as a stepping off point for the project. The values of Respect, Responsibility and Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion were chosen as the core values for the project. It became evident as the project progressed that it was difficult to teach one without the other. All nine values seemed equally important, interrelated and difficult to separate. For example, Respect encompasses Care and Compassion, Fair Go and Honesty and Trustworthiness. As well, Responsibility includes Doing Your Best and Integrity, Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion also have within them the values of Fair Go and Freedom. It seemed that Respect, Responsibility and Understanding, Tolerance And Inclusion are the core values.

In some senses of course, this brief commentary in the name of stating why the National Framework is not ‘useful’ and is only a ‘stepping off point’, is also exactly its opposite in that it constitutes a good example of how the framework is meant to be used. To quote one presenter at the 2006 National Values Forum in Canberra at the start of May, it is a ‘guide’ and not a ‘page’. The intention is that it

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starts a conversation at the school level, or in this case outdoor education camp, rather than closing one off. And that precisely is what occurred in this case.

An understanding of the experience had by students involved in the project can be gained from the following outline of activity taken from the welcome pamphlet they received, shown in Figure 26.

**Figure 26: Birrigai Welcome Pamphlet (extract)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overview</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome! You have been selected among many students throughout the ACT to join a project that will help shape what we teach in schools in the future. So well done! There will be loads of things to learn, and heaps of fun activities to help you learn them, but some of it will be hard work and require a lot of responsibility from you and your friends. Here is what will happen on the project.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1: Workshops</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are four one-day workshops for you to do. Indigenous people who are experts in the four workshop areas will teach them. The workshops are there for you to learn as much as possible about different aspects of Indigenous cultures. They will be on art, history, tools for life and the local Ngunnawal community.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Stage 2: Camp</th>
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<tr>
<td>... The camp will run for four days (three nights in tents) and you will get a chance to use many of Birrigai’s adventure facilities and outdoor areas. The camp is a chance to build your team and leadership skills ... As well as this, you will get a chance to revisit what you have learnt in the workshops and put together a teaching session (or performance) to show us what you have learnt.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 3: Primary school workshop(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>You will now get a chance to teach primary school children near your high school. This is to give those students someone to look up to in high school, and also to develop your leadership skills.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

So while it should be a great experience, you will need to keep thinking about what you have learnt, and how you will teach this to primary students. Will it be through a story, painting, a performance or play, or through games and role-play? It will be up to you to decide.

The outline of the art workshop in Figure 27 gives an idea of the form the four workshops took.

**Figure 27: Art workshop outline**
Time | Activity
---|---
10 am | Arrive at Birrigai
10–10.30 | Welcome introduction to teachers
10.30–11.00 | Stories behind the art, collection of items
11.00–12.00 | Traditional art tools, starting own art work
12.00–1.00 pm | Lunch
1.00–2.00 | Complete art work
2.00 | Depart Birrigai

When you are doing your art work, think about the following questions, then write a short answer to them as you go, or at the end of the day:

- Do the art works you have been shown have stories behind them? What are they?
- What do you think the artist values (what is important) when they are making art?
- What is your story behind your piece of art?
- What would be a good artistic thing to do when teaching primary students (you can talk about this one with your mates)?

Although the teaching to be undertaken by the participants has yet to occur, with practice sessions scheduled to rehearse and build confidence among the group, anecdotal evidence from teachers suggests the experience has been a positive one for the students involved, with increased levels of responsibility in particular being demonstrated. It is anecdotal evidence bolstered by feedback from the students using a short and simple questionnaire (Figure 28) that is readily adaptable to other similar activities in schools.

**Figure 28: Indigenous Education Project – Quick questionnaire**

In order for us to see how the project is going, it would be very helpful if you answered the following questions quickly. Thanks.

Please circle one of the numbers next to each statement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I now know more about my personal values.</td>
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<td>My values have changed as a result of this project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>I wish people understood more about my own values.</td>
<td>Learning about Indigenous or cultural values is important.</td>
<td>Our school teaches good values.</td>
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</table>

**What is a value?**

**What are the most important values to you?**

**Are people’s values mostly different or mostly the same?**

**What values differ between cultures?**

**What things have you enjoyed/not enjoyed about the project so far?**

The fact that the project, like many cluster projects in this report, was not able to be completed within the time frame reflects the extensive planning required to get it off the ground, which only was compounded by changes in personnel, including the departure of the project founder. ‘If the process was to be repeated in future’, this cluster recommends, ‘Birrigai would ask for an 18-month period … Six months to plan the project with cluster schools and 12 months in one calendar year to implement it’.

**Key messages**

1. Professional development for leading staff from partner schools needs to occur at the commencement of any shared project, with regular meetings and communication through other means. Initial reflection by leadership in the cluster and staff professional development can help clarify the purpose of values education and the student outcomes it aims to produce.

2. Leadership of values education needs to be shared to gain maximum ‘buy in’ from participating schools. One person leading and doing everything does not achieve buy in or sustainability over time.

3. Loss of expertise and/or key project leaders has a detrimental effect on project success. Schools need to plan for succession to minimise the impact of any such loss.

4. It is essential to involve communities in the leadership and conduct of values education projects, particularly when working with Indigenous or other cultural communities who have felt disenfranchised in the past.