The Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 1


Something worthwhile to teach

The following project specifically focused on embedding values in the school curriculum and/or connecting to broader systemic curriculum frameworks that apply.

Integrating values education into the middle years curriculum

The Sydney Catholic Schools Cluster (NSW) led the revision of existing resources for integrating values across the curriculum in light of the subsequent emergence of the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools and recently revised syllabuses in New South Wales.

Brighton Cluster (BEACHVALE – Brighton Environmental Action Community Helpers Values Education), Victoria

Cluster coordinator: Carmel Burgess, Brighton Primary School

Participating schools:
• Bentleigh West Primary School
• Berendale School
• Brighton Beach Primary School
• Brighton Primary School
• Elsternwick Primary School
• Gardenvale Primary School
• Brighton Secondary College

UAN critical friend: Professor Lorraine Ling, Latrobe University, Victoria

Middle years (Years 5–9) teachers in the Brighton Cluster of five primary, one high and a special school have long been working together to build an effective learning community and safe school environment ‘to strengthen students’ self-esteem, optimism and commitment to personal fulfilment’.

They have, in this context, developed a Young Leaders’ Group comprising school captains and vice-captains from each of the primary schools meeting with the Student Representative Council (SRC) representatives from the secondary college once a month to develop ideas, activities and programmes across the schools and support activities already in place in each school. The special school, it should be
noted, has chosen not to participate in this group because of the level of challenge for
the students involved in the discussion of planning and activities that occurs, but
they have been keen to participate in such group activities as Harmony Day and
working with high school students to develop and plant an indigenous garden site.

In addition, environmental captains and monitors from each school form another
focus group in the cluster to share ideas and develop programmes to encourage
other students to value the environment. These students, who also meet regularly,
have worked with local community representatives from Bayside City Council, City
Parks and Gardens, Marine Care and South East Water to support such community
activities as planting on the foreshore, planting trees in local parks, cleaning rubbish
from local streets and painting stencils on drains to remind people to dispose of
rubbish in bins. They also have helped to develop posters and brochures
highlighting water conservation, graffiti, reducing energy usage and waste
minimisation.

With such a strong leadership and environment focus it is hardly surprising, then, to
find the cluster’s efforts to move into curriculum provision, student engagement and
decision making should have an environmentally related acronym as its name –
BEACHVALE, which in the cluster’s own words represents:

B Bright Cluster aims to build an effective classroom learning community and to
link issues to those in the wider world.

E Environmental issues are the students’ motivation. They are encouraged to look
at their local environment and to ask questions about how to improve it. We
define the environment to include the physical, economic, cultural and ethical
conditions in which we live.

A Action is the key component of the initiative. Students must be actively engaged
in the process as well as the distributive decision making.

C Community relationships are paramount to the initiative. We broker
relationships with business, industry, government and non-government agencies
to work with the students on relevant issues.

H Helpers will be the students who will identify and tackle a school or community
issue. They will research the issue, make plans and proposals, and take action to
change it.

Extending the project to include values education (VALE – VALues Education)
draws the project together to focus on the development of social skills and student
responsibility in local, national and global contexts as the values are integrated into
all areas of the curriculum.

Taking this a stage further still, the cluster sought to build on existing work it was
undertaking to ease the transition of students from primary to secondary school,
which has seen it already developing some common teaching and learning strategies
and a common understanding of curriculum programmes, by:
• developing and implementing values in student social skills through the integration of values education into all key learning areas for schooling in the middle years;
• developing a common set of values for middle years students to ease transition to secondary school;
• facilitating interaction between students at cluster schools and between students and teachers, and teachers and teachers at other cluster schools;
• building on the technological skills of students to design multimedia presentations for the cluster website to inform the community about the work of students and the schools.

The starting point for all this had to be to develop an understanding of the values in the National Framework and consider the implications for the school community. Students and teachers therefore discussed the values and developed their understanding of each, using such effective techniques as specifying how each of the values can be described, and the sort of behaviour that would demonstrate this value in practice in the school. Some of the flavour of the outcome can be gained from the sample in Table 4 for the value of Care and Compassion.
Table 4: Specifying the values – the example of Care and Compassion (extract)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Meaning – How would you describe this value?</th>
<th>Behaviour – How would this value be demonstrated?</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Care and Compassion          | • Empathy and understanding of student situations and circumstances  
                               • Thinking of impact on others and how they would be affected  
                               • Being nice  
                               • Feeling for sufferings of fellow students  
                               • Caring for others  
                               • Students showing respect for other students and teachers  
                               • Being concerned for others  
                               • Feeling and understanding how others react and wanting to help  
                               • Sympathy for others and the ability to put that sympathy into action | • Eliminating bullying and promoting harmony in school setting  
                               • Visiting community members who are ill, elderly, in need  
                               • Looking after someone if they are hurt, sad or sick  
                               • Friendliness and understanding  
                               • Helping others who have difficulty or problems, with little thought for your own time or effort  
                               • Generally through structures, approaches to tasks and individually as personal situations occur, being treated individually  
                               • Picking up rubbish, caring for the environment |

Although the original objective was to include all middle years teachers and classes in the project, this has, the cluster acknowledges, been difficult to achieve:

There was a variety of reasons put forward by teachers in the schools including the timing of the project and its impact on planning. Introducing the project in the middle of the year meant some teachers were reluctant to change existing programmes to introduce another into an already busy year, or to consider the opportunity to modify, review or redesign units of work to incorporate a values approach. Others saw it as an add on as the existing BEACH [as opposed to BEACHVALE] project was already being implemented with students having identified their area of concern and collected their information and resources.

Given this, the cluster decided to adopt an ‘invitational’ approach rather than mandating participation in the knowledge that those involved would share their ‘stories’ across the cluster and generate momentum as a result. To ensure this did occur, the cluster:

- arranged to share the work that students produced with other classes, teachers and student groups;
- held an expo at the end of last year to involve the community as well;
- is developing a website so sharing can continue.
From a student and curriculum perspective, perhaps the most important aspect of the cluster project was the development of a unit of work by classroom teachers that meets the needs of their own students, which they subsequently have trialed, reviewed and modified as required. Although each teacher adopted their own particular approach, and samples of students’ work will be placed on the BEACHVALE website later in 2006, an idea of how they operated can be gained from the story outlined by one of the teachers involved:

**What values are important to our class?**

It was initially important to establish the values most important to the students in order to allow them some ‘ownership’ over the subsequent work, given that the national and school values are non-negotiated. Students were provided with a comprehensive list of values. They were encouraged to work in small groups to discuss the values and identify the ten they felt were most vital in their lives. These were listed on Post-it® notes and attached by the students under the most relevant ‘National Value’ heading. The school values of caring, respect, responsibility, persistence and positivity were represented in a different colour. In this way, students were able to see how their values ‘matched’ with those of the ‘nation’ and ‘school’. Discussions occurred about overlapping and unclear values. It was interesting that values such as ‘caring’ or ‘respect’ were consistently represented, while ‘integrity’, for example, was far more difficult to define. ‘Lots of them mean kind of the same thing’, suggested C. ‘I could put friendliness under a few headings’, observed J.

It was time to clarify the meaning of each of the national values, and to identify examples of the ways the values might be expressed in a school setting. Students worked in groups to define their own interpretation of the value and how it might be demonstrated in a practical way. Students were encouraged to reflect on occasions where they, or other students, had demonstrated the value …

**Deciding on the stories**

It was at this point that the task was explained to the students. Each of the three classes needed to produce a minimum of three photo stories to illustrate the national values. Each ‘story’ needed to consist of ten pages with a photo and some text on each. The values were divided by class in an arbitrary fashion.

- 5/6M – Care and Compassion; Doing Your Best; Fair Go
- 5/6J – Freedom; Honesty and Trustworthiness; Integrity
- 5/6R – Respect; Responsibility; Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion.

Classes were split into three and spent time brainstorming ideas of appropriate, school-based stories which might illustrate individual values. After contributing to each brainstorm, groups received back their original sheet and discussed the range of ideas suggested by other students. What story would best allow the group to demonstrate their focus value? It was necessary to reach a consensus now on the story they felt was most appropriate for communicating the essential elements of their ‘value’.

The next task was to break the stories down into ten scenes which would be represented on a story board. A discussion on types of shots, and when they might be used, occurred. For example, a ‘full shot’ may be used to set the scene or a ‘close up’ to...
show emotion. Pairs then worked relatively independently to develop storyboards showing group storyline, including some text. Suggestions were now shared and the group combined ideas from paired storyboards to work towards the creation of one group story board. The importance of valuing the ideas and input of all group members was reinforced. Groups were given a high level of autonomy in deciding how they would demonstrate the national values in their stories. Where inappropriate ideas were suggested, the group was questioned and redirected as required. For example, one group wanted to refer to a key character as the ‘class geek’ which they would reinforce by having him wear glasses and putting the letter ‘L’ on his forehead. Discussions on stereotyping and using inaccurate, ‘lazy’ generalisations occurred. It was observed that stereotyping is very common in television programmes and movies enjoyed by some of the students.

In general, students were encouraged to take ownership of the stories, interpreting the values in a way that was meaningful to them. The website as an audience was discussed and students were encouraged to reflect on the ways their work and ideas may be interpreted by others. They were encouraged to make the story lines believable. First, taking the photos had to be feasible, so special effects, off-school locations and non-classmate characters had to be removed from storyboards. Characters also needed to behave in realistic ways and students were challenged to refine their thinking as they prepared the final story board. ‘Would that character do/say that?’ ‘Why has the situation suddenly changed in the very last scene?’ ‘What could you add to demonstrate the value even better?’ ‘What will your audience learn about your value from reading your photo story?’ ‘What is the best shot for that scene?’

The teacher then goes on to describe the processes of:

- preparing the running sheet, taking shots and writing the text;
- creating PowerPoint® presentations on it all.

Using a similar approach, another cluster school grouped students differently, with a focus on task rather than the specific values they pursued. In this case, students were asked to form:

- a writers’ group, which had to create the story outline, write the story, edit and proofread the work, create a storyboard, publish the work and, at all times, liaise with the other group;
- an arts group, which had to establish the story characters (real people, puppets, stuffed toys etc), create all required props, locate and prepare areas for the photo shoot, take photographs, create a picture board, design a poster and also liaise at all times with the other group.

Then both groups needed to work together to create the PowerPoint® presentation, thereby ensuring the text and graphics were linked and a coherent photo story produced.

In something of a variation on the theme, a third school structured its photo story production process in the following way:
The students were divided into mixed ability groups comprising writers, organiser, illustrators, etc.

Groups discussed their given value and brainstormed scenarios where this might be witnessed.

Time was spent in each classroom looking at examples of photo stories, such as Dougal the Garbage Dump Bear, by Matt Dray and Pearson’s Snapshot series.

Groups then commenced action – planning, writing, taking photos and producing their stories.

There was regular discussion with staff to ensure the book’s value was clear and well expressed.

A hundred minutes a week was set aside in class time to allow all this to occur. Students also devoted other spare time during the week to the task, and additional time was allocated towards the end of the project so the books were completed on time. Finished books were then displayed at the Middle Years Expo at the end of 2005, with a further display planned for the school library later in 2006.

As can be seen from this series of school vignettes, technology had a significant role to play in students’ work, particularly as a means of facilitating discussions about the values, sharing ideas and generally enabling students and teachers to interact. That said, some schools did experience difficulties with the technology, largely due to the lack of confidence of staff, with the result that further support will be provided so webcams and an intranet can operate in and across the schools.

Beyond this, as students became more involved in their projects, the technology aspect became less important to them and, although many chose to use PowerPoint® presentations and photos to develop their stories, some opted for a different approach; one school developed a series of short plays based on scripts the students wrote and rehearsed.

In addition to this common ‘story-based’ work, cluster meetings have enabled middle years teachers to share values education ideas, and professional development sessions have introduced them to a range of thinking tools underpinning an inquiry learning approach. One particular side benefit of this has been the insight gained by primary and secondary teachers into each other’s work, as evident in the following two feedback comments from teachers in cluster schools:

- Many of the issues we deal with at the secondary level, such as respect, classroom etiquette and intrinsic motivation, were instigated very early on in the primary classroom through constant reinforcement. I noticed that, although there were 44 students in a combined classroom, the noise level … stayed at a very pleasing level over a two-hour period without the teachers telling students to be quiet … the students clearly understood which level of noise was appropriate.
It was interesting to see the differences in behaviour and expectations, comparative to a primary setting. There are certainly more challenges to management in a secondary environment.

It is clear from the preceding outline of cluster activities that much has been achieved in a short time through this values-based curriculum approach; however, from the cluster’s own point of view, the ‘most significant outcome of the project’ to date has been

… the development of the inquiry learning strategies and the involvement of the students in working towards their completed product. At each school, teachers have reported a ‘real buzz’ from the students as they have worked in groups, researched, organised, created and designed their stories. Students can readily identify the value, discuss the issues, explain the impact and demonstrate the behaviours in their environment.

And, as one student typically and very concisely noted at the Expo late last year, ‘I have learnt that I can make a difference’.

Key messages

1. The nine values need to be contextualised to your own school environment and explained in language that has meaning to all in your school. This may also mean, as happened with this cluster, that the nine values are boiled down to a much smaller list.

2. Students’ efforts and accomplishments should be recognised and celebrated as part of the process of reinforcing positive student behaviours and generating increased momentum for values education in the school.

3. Schools ought not be afraid to build on what exists, such as the middle years BEACH project in this cluster.

4. Teachers need to be invited to join the values education journey rather than being forced to engage. Early adopters should be encouraged to share their successes, failures and work to encourage the participation of others in the school.