Guiding ethos and whole school approach

The National Framework suggests that quality values education programmes arise in part from schools and their communities identifying what the community values (its guiding ethos) and working together (whole school approach) to see it actualised. Several clusters envisaged that such things would be the emphasis of their efforts over the duration of their project. Some speculated that, building on the Values for Australian Schooling in the National Framework, they would pursue a particular, homegrown set of values either as a whole school or by getting a ‘critical mass’ involved in the project. The following project loosely fits into this part of our taxonomy.

Reconciling different approaches

The Broken Bay Diocese Cluster (NSW) sought to determine how the nine Values for Australian Schooling and their associated guiding principles can be incorporated with the ten overarching religious statements in the Diocesan Catholic Worldview Statement, as the basis for developing the more detailed policies and practices the schools adopt.

Broken Bay Diocese Cluster, New South Wales
Cluster coordinator: Chris Comerford, St Peter’s Catholic College and Paul Carnemolla, Diocese of Broken Bay
Participating schools:
- Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic School
- Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Primary School
- St Bernard’s Catholic Primary School
- St Brendan’s Catholic Primary School
- St Cecilia’s Catholic Primary School
- St Martin de Porres Catholic Primary School
- St Philip Neri Catholic School
- Mercy College
- St Peter’s Catholic College
UAN critical friend: Dr Ross Keating, Australian Catholic University, NSW
The Broken Bay Diocese Cluster of Catholic schools also focused on ethos for their project, in their efforts to bring together the values in the National Framework and the ten statements comprising the June 2004 Diocesan Catholic Worldview Statement.

More specifically, the two secondary and seven primary schools in the cluster sought to determine how the nine Values for Australian Schooling and their associated guiding principles can be incorporated with the ten overarching religious statements written to define the Catholicity of schools in the diocese. This in turn will provide the basis for developing the more detailed policies and practices the schools then adopt in such areas as curriculum, teaching and learning and student wellbeing.

Although ostensibly a relatively straightforward task it required, according to the cluster’s university associate,

*a great deal of soul searching and reflection. For each of the schools had to closely re-evaluate and, to a certain extent, reformulate what was the nature of the unique quality of Catholic education they were offering their students, in terms of values, and then consider how this could be evidentially ‘measured’, while … showing how the nine values of the National Values Framework could be seen to be fully and directly incorporated into this larger Catholic ‘framework’. The cluster schools approached this task individually, yet supported each other in their sharing of ideas and in so doing built up a closer connection with each other.*

The task, this respondent explained, was seen by teachers in particular as ‘very positive’ and ‘valuable’ and was enthusiastically embraced. In large part this reflected the ‘democratic processes’ already in place and the extensive professional development provided along the way.

Typical of the approach was one school’s use of progressively deeper questions to determine what staff and others really believed. Under the broad heading of ‘How can the (name of school) community be strengthened through you?’, members of the school community were challenged to address values-related questions of progressively increasing depth as the school developed its strategic plan. These included such questions as:

- How am I able to contribute to the achievement of a just and compassionate society?
- How am I able to help in bringing about a community that is just and fair (Kingdom)?
- How am I developing the capacity to learn independently and in partnership with others?
- How can you contribute to fostering community spirit?
- How open are you and how do you welcome those who are different into your group?
- What do you want to achieve that seems beyond your reach now?
• When have you demonstrated strength and wisdom?
• What have you recently initiated that has resulted in change for the better?

Regardless of the actual technique used, however, having both sets of values statements under discussion in all cases created ‘a fruitful dialogue’ within cluster schools that in turn has led to a deeper consideration of the nature of values education within the schools and a clearer focus on what can be achieved.

This is evident in the case of two of the primary schools, which are working together to go the next step into the curriculum and teaching and learning domains by:
• developing a K–12 resource for teachers aligned to integrated teaching and learning units that support better values education practice within classrooms;
• articulating and making explicit the Catholic values underpinning our schools and aligning them with the nine values for Australian schooling;
• providing students with the skills to express in actions community responsibility;
• embedding values in teaching programmes across all key learning areas.

This action builds on earlier work by these schools to redesign curriculum around core concepts, or ‘big ideas’ such as community, change, environment and systems. It involves, in effect, moving from the scope and sequence level the schools already had reached, to the detail of teaching and learning programmes by creating a curriculum planning support document to help teachers develop units of work that ensure values education is explicitly addressed. Eventually this document will also be online, so teachers can refer to resources related to each of the big ideas and suggested strategies for how they best can be taught.

Some of the flavour of the approach can be gained from this very simplified outline related to the big idea of ‘Choices’ developed by the schools (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: The big idea of Choices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Related concepts</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Catholic world view</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Conflict</td>
<td>• Freedom</td>
<td>• Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lifestyle</td>
<td>• Honesty and Trustworthiness</td>
<td>• Trinity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Influence</td>
<td>• Doing Your Best</td>
<td>• Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Respect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bias</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Decision making</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consumerism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Peer pressure</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Responsibility</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Possible contexts/Units of work

• Nutrition
• Media
• Groups
• Healthy choices

• Exercise
• Friendships
• Consumers
• Relationships
• Leisure
• Safety

Teaching and learning experiences

• Hot seat
• Conducting surveys and analysing the data
• Examining statistics
• Developing action plans, eg how to become more fit
• Investigating people in society who have made choices that have made a
difference, eg Fred Hollows
• Exploring moral dilemmas and developing effects wheels or consequence charts
• Investigating local, national or world events and the impact of choices made, eg
war in Iraq, buying Australian made goods
• Using literary texts, eg The Present Takers by Aiden Chambers
• Values continuum from strongly agree to strongly disagree, eg advertising and
promoting fast foods should be banned

In a related, though different vein, another cluster school put its stated commitment
to social justice into practice by supporting one charity (Mercy Works) aligned to the
school’s philosophy and roots to establish more meaningful relations for students
with those they are seeking to help. This year-long focus on a single charity was seen
as a vehicle for ‘developing in students a real and grounded understanding of the
Catholic Worldview Statement and the National Values Framework’. It also
provided the basis for building each of these into specific elements of the curriculum
at different stages, such as:

• Early Stage 1 (Kindergarten) – Responsibility: who we are, what it means to be
Catholic, what it means to be part of the Mercy family;
• Stage 2 (Years 1–2) – Respect and Integrity: integrity to do with valuing the
dignity of the human being and respect in terms of having regard for others;
• Stage 2 (Years 3–4) – Fair Go and Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion: look at
human rights (detention centres), rights of individuals, exploring cultures and
where each person comes from;
• Stage 3 (Years 5–6) – Care and Compassion and Freedom: students helping to
provide meals for women in refuge situations, development of links to a specific
Spastic Centre, advocacy activities related to Aboriginal rights and support for
women in situations of domestic violence.

That the students understood the purpose of the school’s overall approach is evident
in such comments by the children as:
• Often we talk about values, but don’t often show them. This is one way where we can put into action what we are on about.
• These Social Justice modules help make us more aware about what this means, and what we can do.
• We often just want to do the fundraising, which is good, but we don’t often know where the money goes. Here we have an understanding about the people who will receive our help, and a focus for why we are fundraising or gathering goods.

Beyond these overt efforts of schools to incorporate values into the curriculum in more explicit ways, all of the cluster schools also report positive changes in the way that teachers and students relate. As one of the schools put it:

The way that most teachers model behaviour to the students has changed. The way many teachers speak to students has changed. It is now commonplace for teachers to speak to students in values terms, using the words from the National Values … For example, if a child has hurt another child, we would bring to the child’s attention the values of ‘Respect’, ‘Care’ and ‘Compassion’ as well as ‘Responsibility’ for our actions. When dealing with a child who is not trying in their school work, the child would be reminded of the importance of ‘Doing your best’ … As a staff we realise the importance of modelling good behaviour and the values are the basis for this.

This reflects efforts flowing from the collaborative exploration of ethos such as one primary school’s transformation of its student behaviour rules from negative to more positive statements with a clear values base. This, the school believes, has proved ‘a powerful tool for changing school culture … [which] cannot be overemphasised’. It in turn has been cemented in place by the development of a unit of work based on the four key school-determined values of Respect, Cooperation, Safety and Learning, which is delivered to all students in the school in an age appropriate way on an annual basis. This eleven-session unit commonly includes a warm up, stimulus, focusing activity and application dimension in each session as illustrated by the outline of Session 2 on Respect in Figure 11.
### Figure 11: Sample session on values teaching unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 2</th>
<th>Respect is …</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Warm up   | Pass the positives  
Sit in a circle. Say one positive thing about the person sitting to your left/right.  
(Probing questions)  
Were you surprised by some of the things someone said about you? Was it good to hear someone say something about you? Why? Is it good for the group to have their talents recognised? Why? |
| Stimulate | Brainstorm  
Write the words ‘Respect is …’ on a display (blackboard or whiteboard, large sheet of paper or an overhead).  
Ask the children for all the words that come to mind when they think of times or people that show respect to other people. |
| Focusing activity | Break the children into six groups by giving them a number from 1 to 6 and give them one of the following areas to discuss and make up a short play:  
• What does respect look like when you are on the bus?  
• What does respect look like when you are lining up to come into school?  
• What does respect look like when you are buying something from the tuckshop?  
• What does respect look like when you are in the playground?  
• What does respect look like when you are in the classroom?  
• What does respect look like when you are in a sacred space? (church, liturgy, etc) |
| Applying | Present plays/role-plays and discuss features and the school values displayed.  
As a class, agree on some of the items that show Respect. (This needs to be displayed throughout the term and constantly reviewed.) |

Important as this and the other sample materials provided above are, however, the cluster schools feel the product matters less than the process from which it derived. As one of them observed when summing up what they had learned:

*One of the most powerful lessons for other Catholic schools is the importance of the intense work with the staff on unpacking the Catholic Worldview and National Values and relating them to everyday school experience. The conversations that occur at this*
stage are vital for teachers to develop a personal as well as a shared understanding of CWV and NV.

The time required for this to occur should not be underestimated. It is not like learning a new syllabus as staff need to first learn about themselves and this takes time. However, a substantial investment of time, preferably in an intense, concentrated block, at the beginning, can pay dividends into the project. If staff can truly internalise the NV and CWV, everything else that follows happens seamlessly. Changes to teaching and learning, school policies, work with the parents are all much easier once the shared understanding and way forward has been developed.

Values education only works where there are good established relationships … and when the principal is supportive and brings values to conversations with students and teachers. School culture and leadership within that school culture is very important. Values need to be at the forefront of school leadership for values education to be effective. … The process is much more important than the product. There are many ways that staff, students and parents can engage with the NV and CWV. What is important is that the intense engagement occurs.

Key messages

1. Although all schools in an area or diocese may have a strong values emphasis in their mission statements and policies, values education provides the opportunity to translate these overarching statements more deeply into practice.

2. Although the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools may provide an additional layer of complexity in Catholic schools, it can assist them in translating Catholic values into measurable, practical improvements in school practice.

3. There is a need to develop a shared understanding of what values education means among staff to underpin the implementation of values education in schools.

4. Injunctions in the project to collect and analyse data to underpin action research do not necessarily work in the absence of training in action research cycles and effective data use.

5. The engagement of parents in values education was possibly the least successful aspect of cluster work, and much work remains to be done to engage parents in dialogue about values and values education in schools.

6. External personnel, such as educational consultants and the Catholic Schools Office, can provide additional expertise to schools along with an objective point of view.