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

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.

Taking small steps towards the big picture of emotional literacy

The restorative practices approach was the centrepiece of the Calwell Cluster’s (ACT) efforts to develop an emotional literacy curriculum that includes specific lessons to develop students’ social skills.

Calwell Cluster, Australian Capital Territory
Cluster coordinator: Kerrie Foulds, Calwell High School

Participating schools:
- Calwell Primary School
- Isabella Plains Primary School
- Richardson Primary School
- Theodore Primary School
- Calwell High School

UAN critical friend: Dr Thomas Nielsen, University of Canberra, ACT

The Calwell Cluster of five schools, like several others, constitutes a good example of category overlap with curriculum and what to teach as the dominant theme.

With restorative practice at its base, the cluster specifically sought to:
- articulate the school community’s educational values through a mapping process;
- increase understanding by the wider community of the role and value of all schools within the cluster;
- increase cooperation between all cluster schools in the delivery of educational programmes;
- build the capacity of parents, students and teachers in supporting this approach (ie restorative practices) in school and community relationships;
- share information, lessons learned and achievements with the wider educational and public community.
Although each of these objectives was pursued in a highly integrated way, the cluster came to the recognition over time that

… it is objective four [build the capacity of parents, students and teachers in supporting this approach (ie restorative practices) in school and community relationships … cf above] which has been the focus of our project as we realised that other objectives (for example, increasing understanding of our community and increasing cooperation between schools) were underpinned by any increased capacity of our community to engage in restorative practices. The development of the actual emotional literacy curriculum was therefore seen by the team and consequently, the schools, as the major focus point of the project.

Important in this context was to ensure, from the start, they were ‘not embarking on a process of change that did not reflect the values of our community’; especially since the restorative practices approach requires the support of the entire school community to succeed. They therefore began with a values audit to map the values of school community stakeholders and draw parallels between those the community holds dear and the values restorative practices promote. Apart from anything else, this whole exercise helped overcome some of the cynicism of staff – particularly once school leaders explained it was designed to make teachers’ work easier rather than be added on – and promoted the message that the schools were working together as a common cluster group.

The values audit basically took the following forms:

- In initial surveys respondents indicated how well they believed their school supported the values in the National Framework; parent responses were encouraged through such means as raffle prizes, emailing the survey home and the like.
- Exploration through community forums and teacher and student discussion groups using such strategies as Y charts, focus questions, ‘circle’ contributions and small group brainstorming to gain agreement on what each value ‘looked like’ in the cluster. Parent involvement proved quite difficult to gain in this context, so random families were contacted by phone and asked to participate in a parallel process on the phone.

Together, these processes enabled the cluster to formalise a list of values articulated in tangible ways, as illustrated by the example in Figure 15 of Doing Your Best.

**Figure 15: The value of Doing Your Best exemplified by the cluster**

As a student I can show I am doing my best by:
Attending all my classes in time/arriving at school on time
Trying really hard all the time
Persisting  
Being involved in extra activities like sporting competitions or dance festivals  
Setting a goal and working to achieve it  
Listening  
Handing in my homework/assignments on time  
Not letting myself get distracted

As a teacher I can encourage my students to do their best by:  
Rewarding positive behaviour/celebrating achievement  
Reflecting on my own practice and modelling a commitment to self-improvement  
Providing opportunities for students to succeed in school and in the wider community  
Expecting excellence and giving students the chance to take a risk in their learning  
Communicating openly with parents and students

As a parent/carer I can encourage my child/ren to do their best by:  
Celebrating their achievements  
Encouraging them to set goals in their learning  
Encouraging them to be positive about school and learning

Cluster schools then were in a position to share the information they had gathered and link it to their broader restorative practices work. This involved using newsletters, media and other events such as Harmony Day Celebrations, as well as staff, board and parents and citizens meetings, school assemblies and other communication mechanisms such as school websites and informal discussions as opportunities to inform their communities about the approach. This all was underpinned by professional development for all cluster staff including a common day where they worked with several random groups of other teachers to complete team building, experiential learning and reflective activities individually and in groups.

The emotional literacy units, which in some senses form the core of the project as a whole, were introduced to teachers at this professional development activity and sample lessons delivered to model the approach. Initial concerns about the overall time for professional development and an unwillingness to ‘engage in experiences because of unfamiliarity with each other’ proved ‘completely unfounded’, with feedback from the session including such comments as:

- *This is the best, most practical PD I have ever done.*
- *I came here feeling very doubtful about emotional literacy and values education. Now I feel incredibly motivated about teaching it in my classroom. These lessons are so easy to follow and I can really see that we can explicitly teach this stuff.*
As this feedback clearly suggests, the quality of the emotional literacy curriculum lessons developed was an important facet of gaining teacher, and subsequently broader school community, support.

Initially, it should be noted, the writing team for these curriculum units sought to conduct a search of available emotional literacy materials and use these pre-existing resources to develop a package for the cluster to use. As they searched, however, they became ‘more passionate about developing a package which reflected the needs of our community’ and discovered ‘no such package exists’. Thus they had to develop their own.

This involved:
- research and reading for about a month to inform conversations around the meaning of emotional literacy and what their curriculum needed to achieve;
- writing a series of outcomes, linked to the national values and what they ought look like as the basis for devising a plan for the curriculum package.

The package, it was decided, would consist of a set of explicit lesson plans so that ‘teachers who were unfamiliar with the concepts and understandings would … be able to successfully deliver this programme’. For the most part, grades were divided into two-year groups (K, 1–2, 3–4, 5–6, 7–8 and 9–10) with four-term sets of ten lessons per term to be provided for each cohort. In other words, when it all is done, a total of 40 lessons per cohort or 240 lessons across the span from K–10.

The lessons devised, and under continuing development, cover social skills, recognition and regulation of emotions, and empathy. They become increasingly complex as the students progress, from social skills in the early years focused on small group skills, while high school lessons look outwards more, allowing students to consider their position in the wider community.

Some of the flavour of the units developed can be gained from the following summary and extract from the units for Years 9 and 10 (Figure 16).

**Figure 16: Term 1 Social Skills, Years 9 and 10 (summary)**

<table>
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<th>Overview</th>
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<td>The ten lessons for Term 1 specifically focus on developing skills in the areas of cooperation, responsibility and negotiation. These in turn are designed to lead to deeper learning in the areas of empathy, respect and understanding of the role of self and others. They also aim to develop skills in reflection and critical literacy.</td>
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<th>Lessons 1–5</th>
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<td>These lessons aim to develop an environment of trust, respect and reflection among the class as a group. The suggested activities are designed to ensure that students</td>
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have opportunities to work with all class members, to reflect on their own behaviours and to work constructively towards contributing to their communities. The lesson topics are: Working cooperatively (Lesson 1); Negotiating with others (Lesson 2); Responsibility (Lesson 3); Positive and negative social behaviours (Lessons 4 and 5).

Lessons 6–10
These lessons aim to direct students to a consideration of their role in the wider society. The suggested activities are designed to encourage students to understand the structures of their society and the way in which different groups are affected by these, to develop empathy skills and to appreciate the role of the individual within wider society. They are based on the thinking of the philosopher John Rawls, who is known for his theories of Fairness and Justice. Specific lesson topics covered are: Fairness (Lesson 6); Structures of society (Lesson 7); The ideal society (Lesson 8); Testing the theory (Lesson 9); and Testing and reflecting (Lesson 10).

Lesson structure
The lessons are based on the Circle Time lesson structure and suggested activities have a large ‘circle’ component. This is, however, only the suggested approach and should a teacher wish to use a mix of alternative methods, such as table groups or individual worksheets, then activities can be readily adapted to different teaching and learning styles.

Resources
The resources required for each lesson are listed on the lesson plans.

Lesson 4 as a sample of the approach

Focus
Positive and negative social behaviours – creating a board game to demonstrate and share understanding

Values demonstrated
Fair Go; Respect; Responsibility; Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion; Integrity

Learning outcomes
Throughout the lesson, students will be working towards demonstrating:
• their understanding of socially appropriate behaviours;
• their ability to work cooperatively and responsibly;
• an understanding of their role in the school community.
Activities

Check in – The thing I most enjoy about school is …

Mixer – Use a technique of your choice to divide students into groups of four to six.

Central activity – Explain to students that they will be making a Social Behaviours Board Game which then will be used by students in Years 7 and 8 to learn about social behaviours. They may like to make it a snakes and ladders style game or come up with their own format. Moves will need to target positive and negative social behaviours. They first will need to make a list of what these behaviours might be (eg responsible/irresponsible; cooperative/uncooperative). Then they can begin to design their games. They will have this and the next lesson to complete this, so will need to allocate roles within their groups to ensure that everything can get done.

Check out – A positive social behaviour/a negative social behaviour we are including is …

Resources
Cardboard, coloured pens and pencils, scrap paper for brainstorming and drafting.

Not surprisingly, producing this wealth of material was a mammoth task which continually suffered from the rigours of time, with the result the cluster had to scale back its ambitions and write only two terms’ worth of lessons (still 120) in the first instance rather than all four; though the developmental work continues to occur.

Having trialed lessons in their own classrooms, members of the writing team revised them as required before asking a small number of other teachers to look through and trial the lessons as well. Their feedback was then added to the process of revision, while they continued the task of informing staff to gain agreement that all teachers would deliver these lessons in Term 1, 2006. This all was reinforced by whole cluster professional development for staff to become familiar with the lessons and their format and the range of different ways in which they can be used. This professional development proved particularly important and helpful – an astonishing 98% of staff indicated they were ‘very positive’ about it all and ‘felt very motivated towards delivering the lessons’. This only emphasises the importance of continuing professional development for the programme to succeed, particularly when new staff arrive in the school to replace others who have left.

From the point of view of the writing team this was, as one young member put it,

… the hardest thing I have ever done in my short teaching career. The hours we committed to developing the lessons, the energy we gave to sharing this programme with other teachers and families and the thinking that we did around how we could achieve
what we wanted to achieve … I found it exhausting. However, this work is also the work I am most proud of. I think we have done something really important and unique.

But the outcomes were not restricted to those so intimately involved, and extended to others who saw the effect on students the lessons produced. As one teacher typically put it:

The overall feeling in the class is calmer and more cohesive. The emotional literacy programme has provided a framework for our class to feel comfortable to discuss our emotions and has given them a specific language to talk about how they are feeling.

Analysis by the cluster schools in this context suggests the two major outcomes achieved by the project revolve around the way it has supported and led to:

- changes in student attitudes and abilities to engage in restorative practices, and hence improved student learning opportunities in the cluster;
- changes in teacher attitudes and abilities to engage in restorative practices, and hence improved teaching and learning in the cluster.

As two project team members reflected on their experience:

One of the biggest achievements for the project is the development of the students’ ability to articulate feelings and emotions. Having taught in the area of early childhood for the past three years, the emotional development of the students is clearly evident. This is apparent not only in explicit social and emotional lessons taught, but the transference of these skills is also becoming apparent in all aspects of classroom teaching and in the students’ ability to deal with conflict in the playground. One example being in a Years 1–2 classroom, when a young girl came in from lunch time saying, ‘I’m sad because (student) would not play with me …’ Before the teacher had a chance to speak to the girls, another Year 1 girl initiated the use of relational questioning to assist her peers to solve their problem and hence feel happy once again with each other and within their friendship.

The consequence is, that in targeted feedback sessions conducted by the school, teachers report ‘increased ability to build relationships with their students, to discuss deeper issues (such as world affairs) with students and to engage them in other learning experiences’.

These sorts of outcomes in turn have been reflected in such second order, or as the cluster puts it, ‘less significant’, outcomes as strengthened relationships between teachers in the cluster, and increased engagement of parents in restorative practices. And they are outcomes primarily achieved ‘because of consistent, ongoing communication, the rigorous curriculum that has been developed and the success of the professional development sessions we have delivered throughout the period (allowing for teacher understanding and commitment)’.

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The project team recognises in this context a need to expand the responsibilities of the ongoing work of the project and prepare a succession plan for when key people move, as will occur at the end of 2006. Among other things this will involve:

- providing specific Circle Time training to a cross-cluster group of teachers who will remain at the school for three to five years and who have an interest in emotional literacy and restorative practices;
- drawing a wider values team from this group, who will be responsible for revising and refurbishing the emotional literacy curriculum to continually reflect the needs of the school and provide ongoing support and in-service training to teachers across the cluster;
- working collaboratively with the new team and providing a six-month handover with original team members, who remain in the cluster continuing in a leadership role.

**Key messages**

1. Focusing on developing school values that reflect the community’s values, and involving all stakeholders in the process, can help to overcome some of the cynicism that may exist among staff.

2. When school community input has been gained, and an understanding of the meaning of different values agreed between the stakeholders, it is important to share this regularly through newsletters, meetings, Circle Time, professional development, team building and other means of communication used by the school.

3. The quality of emotional literacy curriculum lessons developed was, in this cluster, an important facet of gaining teacher and subsequently community support. Success in this context depended, however, on work at the outset to gain school community support for the overall approach.

4. This cluster benefited from developing their own emotional literacy units of work as opposed to trying to find a ready-made package to adopt. Locally developed units of work can support the development of agreed school community values and address real community concerns. The success of units in this case reflected the professional development that accompanied unit development and subsequent trialing by teachers.

5. Building students’ emotional literacy can generate calmer classes and an increased focus on learning in class.