The Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 1


Teaching it well

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

A pedagogy of service learning

The Canterbury Cluster (Qld) pursued the concept of service learning with students in the middle years of school.

Canterbury Cluster, Queensland
Cluster coordinator: Mary-Anne Davis, St Hilda’s School
Participating schools:
- Canterbury College
- Loganlea State High School
- Marsden State High School
- St Hilda’s School

UAN critical friends: Dr Peta Goldberg, Australian Catholic University, Queensland and Professor Judith Chapman, Australian Catholic University, Victoria

The cross-sectoral Canterbury Cluster of two independent and two state high schools, and their principals, who already shared an interest in conducting ‘a developmental activity related to the new values imperative’, agreed to pursue the concept of service learning with students in the middle years.

More specifically, it was decided that each school would develop a programme comprising:
- professional development for staff on the nature of service learning;
- planning for the development and subsequent implementation of a specific school-related task that reflected the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools and service learning, both in the process adopted and the product that results.
In a context where both narrow and broad definitions of service learning abound, the one the cluster chose to guide its work is that service learning involves:

- service to others integrated into cross-currucular programmes;
- a learning context where the concept of service is both explicit and implicit;
- a two-way learning process – ie there is explicit reciprocity between the school and the outside community.

Given that two of the four schools in the cluster were somewhat newer to service learning than the other two, this did mean that significant time needed to be spent at the start of the project unpacking what this means, and providing professional development and other support for staff who were to be involved.

Early activities initiated in each of the cluster schools involved discussion with students, and ‘creative representation’ as they unpacked each of the values in the national set. This took such different forms in the schools as creating wall art to represent the values, graphics representations using the school’s information and communications technologies, development of a whole school community based values statement and more.

This then provided the basis for cluster schools to generate specific student-led service learning projects for 2006 such as:

- working in aged care centres;
- reading programmes for people in hospitals;
- developing safe travel programmes for students going to and from schools;
- co-curricular service learning projects;
- further environmental projects conducted after appropriate needs analysis;
- development of a Student Action Team linked to the Red Cross.

In addition, each of the schools has conducted work with individual class groups related to service learning and the nine values in the National Framework.

The cluster lead school, for instance, included specific teaching and learning activities based on aged care. Through such activities as producing a CD-ROM of songs, hosting a morning tea, and journal writing and reflection in Year 8 Personal Development classes they considered service learning in depth and the way in which this reflects the values in the National Framework.

The Year 8 students involved formed a partnership with the staff and residents of the local Beenleigh Nursing Home and visited on a weekly basis for a term starting in the second week, which had a quick and dramatic impact on their views. Typical of the remarks of students involved was:

- I have learnt different values.
- I learnt about care and compassion. [and even somewhat hopefully]
Did they like the stuff we made?

Certainly the school observed that:

*The overall confidence of the students grew as they gained an understanding of the needs of the residents and they came away feeling a sense of achievement and greater understanding. This then flowed into the conversation and written responses gained after the trip. The students showed compassion to the circumstances the residents lived in and wanted to discuss other ways they could help.*

In part, no doubt, this growth in confidence and values-related understanding flows from the school’s expectation that the students would keep a learning journal where they responded to well thought out questions and tasks.

Some of the flavour of the journal can be gained from the following set of questions included in it, related to the students’ second visit to the home (Figure 23).
Figure 23: Learning Journal, Section 2, Second Visit – Orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>What are some ways you can get to know someone?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Is there anything you need to remember about communicating clearly with the residents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>What topics might be good to talk about with the residents?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**After visit reflection:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>What activities did you participate in with the residents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Who did you spend your time with?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>How did the residents react when you were with them? What did they talk about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>How did you feel when talking?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>What did you learn about the resident while you were talking with them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>If you could only choose two words to describe your first meeting, what would they be? (Draw a kinetic poem of the words.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This particular service learning activity, it should be emphasised, is not separate from the rest of the learning programme of the school, and in fact is integrated with the different key learning areas as indicated by Figure 24, which the school produced on the programme overview and how it fits with the rest of the curriculum.
In addition, students completed the ACER Attitudes and Values Survey at the beginning of the project to give staff a basis of data on which their judgements about progress could be made.

Taking a rather different tack, another cluster school undertook a number of small projects under the banner ‘Girls’ Day In/Boys’ Day Out’ as well as a Year 9 Environment Day.

An idea of the focus of each of the girls’ and boys’ days can be gained from the following brief outline in Figure 25 of the programme of events in each case.

**Figure 25: Programme of events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girls’ Day In</th>
<th>(On campus)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction:</strong></td>
<td>Address by the Principal/Year 9 Coordinator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session 1:</strong></td>
<td>Keynote speaker on the theme, ‘Respect yourself’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sessions 2, 3 and 4:</strong></td>
<td>Students rotate through each hourly activity session:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Activity 1:</td>
<td>A practical self-defence class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Activity 2:</td>
<td>Graffiti workshop with Mothers Against Drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Activity 3:</td>
<td>Body image with school nurse/Teen Challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion:</strong></td>
<td>Positive affirmations, debrief and evaluation of values learnt, and creation of student works of art.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys’ Day Out</th>
<th>(Off campus)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction:</strong></td>
<td>Address by Deputy/Year 9 Coordinator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session 1:</strong></td>
<td>Keynote speaker on the theme ‘Get motivated’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sessions for the remainder of the day:</strong></td>
<td>Students work through physical activities with facilitators including rock wall, low ropes and adventure challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion:</strong></td>
<td>Debrief and evaluation of values learnt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the works of art from the Girls’ Day In, the school notes that students ‘were proud of their work and now, many months later, the art work is still on display and has not been vandalised in any way’.

The other two schools in the cluster engaged in a special project involving regeneration of parkland opposite the school in one case and, in the other, a programme coordinated by staff and the Year 9 Community Service Learning Committee that, after a false start, focused on working with the Red Cross and St Luke’s Nursing Service to provide support for the homeless in the local area.

The positive impact these differing programmes had can be seen in the following typical before and after comments students made as a result of their experiences.

Initially their comments included such responses to what values might mean as:

- I value shopping because it is fun and exciting.
- I value my friends and my cat.
- Who cares?
Values are the stuff church teaches.

By the time they had undertaken their projects, however, the comments exhibited a marked change:

- Understanding because you need to know how people feel and what they think.
- I value my life and understanding.
- Don’t take life for granted because it is too short.
- I now value my youth and have more respect for the elderly and the way they live.
- There are values in everything. I just didn’t realise it before.

And, in one particularly direct and personal response which illustrates how important personal experience can be:

From all of the people in the respite centre, I saw how they respected me and they tolerated how hopeless I was. They were so patient it was unbelievable. I really respect them and I tried to do my best because it was so important to them – all of those values things really.

The challenge the cluster is now seeking is to take the next step and further link the projects they initiated to curriculum development so that values are made explicit in programmes across the schools. The four schools involved are, it is acknowledged, at different stages in this regard depending on:

- the amount of professional development available to staff;
- the willingness of the principals to drive the initiatives;
- the history of effective change management in the school;
- the current state of programmes;
- their processes for curriculum and programme review.

They are committed, though, to working together beyond the life of Stage 1 of the Good Practice Schools Project, so the curriculum and pedagogical impact they already have had can continue to grow. A particular strength on which each school can draw in this context is the partnerships they developed within their local communities. As the cluster’s final report explains:

Across the four schools, links were developed with aged care associations, associations supporting the disabled, Red Cross, environmental agencies, student support agencies, church-based support agencies and local councils. These links would not have been forged if the project had not occurred. In all instances it would appear that these links would continue.

For all of that, there is a feeling perhaps it was somewhat too easy ‘to concentrate on the service learning side of the project, rather than on the values education side’ and that, although this was consciously addressed on the way, it would have
been preferable had it been part of the initial planning. That said, the whole project has been a professional learning experience for the schools and the individuals involved, and this is one lesson that can now inform practice in other clusters and schools.
Key messages

1. It is important to avoid being overly ambitious in your goals, but to have realistic and achievable objectives instead.

2. Values are at the core of service learning and, similarly, service learning can increase awareness of the core values to which we adhere. Service learning starts with discussion in the classroom and activities students can undertake.

3. It is important that students are actively involved in unpacking the language of values, and have ownership of the projects they undertake.

4. Ongoing professional development, dialogue, reflection and evaluation are important contributors to values education success.

5. The commitment and support of the principal is important if values education is to be successfully implemented in the school.

6. Diversity can be a strength for clusters and can allow for extensive professional development for every staff member involved in the cluster meetings. Difference is an opportunity, not a threat.

7. Cross-sectoral projects may need additional time in the planning stage to ensure agreement to the core objectives by all schools. Time spent getting to know the strengths and challenges in each school can be valuable for all concerned.