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

Connecting to the community

Engaging the school community in values education and the development of young people as productive citizens and contributors to society was pursued by five clusters of schools.

Building inclusive, values-based school communities

The Fremantle Cluster (WA) undertook a three-phase project to engage school communities in developing a set of guiding principles and values that could become embedded in the vision, policies, practices and teaching programmes of each school.

Fremantle Cluster, Western Australia
Cluster coordinator: Gregory Travers, Spearwood Primary School
Participating schools:
- Coolbellup Community School
- Coogee Primary School
- Jandakot Primary School
- Newton Primary School
- Phoenix Primary School
- South Coogee Primary School
- Spearwood Primary School
- Hamilton Senior High School

UAN critical friend: Professor Barry Down, Murdoch University, WA

The Fremantle Cluster of eight schools undertook a three-phase project to engage school communities according to their particular stage of values education development and needs as identified through extensive data gathering from the stakeholders involved. A key objective in this context was to develop a set of guiding principles and values for each school that then could become ‘an embedded part of the school vision, policies, practices and teaching programmes, leading to a more inclusive school culture in each of the cluster schools’.

More specifically the three phases involved the following:

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• Phase 1 – School communities were engaged by gathering information on different perspectives related to values education. Surveys were administered to about 900 students in Years 2, 4, 6 and 8 as well as more than 1,000 parents and staff from the cluster schools. In the interests of both efficiency and getting a more expert response, a consultant was contracted to develop the survey instruments, analyse the data and develop a school profile based on the outcomes. The actual surveys took the form of:
  – a teacher-centred survey for students in Year 2, where input was provided from a large book with pictures similar to an answer sheet the students were given, and the teachers were offered three choices of what a student would do in a series of five situations they were read;
  – a Years 4–10 survey comprising 160 statements, which the student read and to which they then indicated their level of agreement,
  – a parent questionnaire containing 32 values statements (based on the set that applies in Western Australia), where parents could rank the importance of values to them as well as how well they thought the school is teaching these values;
  – a teacher questionnaire along similar lines to that used with parents.

• Phase 2 – Having prepared reports for each school, the consultant facilitated community and staff workshops to discuss the analysis of their own data from students, parents and staff. This enabled them to consider some potential ideas for future planning and implementation of values education in the school related to the particular values of interest or concern: whether these be personal meaning and contribution to community as it was in one cluster primary school; critical reflection, world views and social justice as was the case in another; and so on. Each of the schools also received two hours of professional learning in the area of values education from the consultant in an area relevant to their own outcomes, and hence relevant to what they planned to do next.

• Phase 3 – Planning and implementation of school-based projects took place to address identified values education needs. This phase of the project was the opportunity for each school to develop its own values education plan, based on the data analysis it received and the subsequent workshop and professional learning results. This planning specifically addressed the identified needs of the school and assisted it to integrate values education into its overall vision statement and School Development Plan for 2006.

Though each of the schools was different, and their staff workshops threw up different issues and concerns, three common factors did come through the data analysis, which then influenced the nature and focus of school plans. In particular:
• students demonstrated a lack of explicit understanding of values;

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• teachers needed to focus on teaching specific values;
• parents felt there should be more values in the curriculum.

All parents, it should be noted in this context, were invited to attend a values workshop but, in common with a number of clusters covered by this report, attendance was relatively poor even if enthusiasm was high. Parents who did attend received information on the project, what the data identified and what the school planned in response. Almost without exception, they were keen to know how they could contribute further or become involved. The general consensus was that the schools were doing well, the teachers communicated effectively, the surveys themselves recognised the views of parents, and parents would support programmes initiated by the schools. To the extent parents sought more involvement, though, they wanted it to be via their children’s classroom teachers.

An understanding of the sort of approaches that schools took in response to their data and subsequent analysis of key values on which emphasis needs to be placed, can be gained from the range of strategies (seen in Figure 29) developed by the lead school in relation to Personal Meaning.
This is only reinforced in the school by items in each week’s newsletter related to Personal Meaning with specific advice on discussion starters for parents at home. Figure 30 gives an example.

Figure 30: Sample discussion starters

Newsletter 1

... Primary is developing a holistic approach to the development of values education for the classroom, school and home.

Parents, you are invited to become involved in the teaching of these core values and help your child to develop a sense of personal meaning and identity.

This week the focus is: ‘Who am I?’

Take the time to discuss the following:
1. Know the things that motivate them.
2. Know the things that make them laugh, make them happy, sad ...

Newsletter 2
Parents, you are invited to become involved in the teaching of these core values and help your child to develop a sense of personal meaning and identity.

This week the focus is: ‘I am the way I am’

1. Know what they are good at.
2. Know what they are not good at.
3. Understand the things that influence them.

Another cluster school, whose data exposed a need to develop the value of Respect, devised a schema (Table 17) for Respect to be addressed by school staff for an eleven-week term.

### Table 17: Respect and concern for others and their rights, Term 1, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Values in education goals: Respect</th>
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</table>
| 2    | Using respectful manners towards others: Greetings  
Greeting and addressing school staff using respectful title (eg good morning/afternoon, excuse me, Mr, Ms, Mrs, Miss, Sir) |
| 3    | Use respectful manners towards others: Entering other classrooms and administration offices  
Classroom entrance technique (eg knock on door, wait to be invited in, excuse me Mr …, express purpose, wait for response, thank you Mr …, leave room quietly) |
| 4    | Self-respect: Look after themselves by …  
Eating healthy food, wearing appropriate hat during play, healthy personal habits |
| 5 and 6 | Respecting everyone’s right to be different: No put downs  
Respect other people’s differences – physical, cultural, ability, gender (eg no name calling, praising others’ achievements, ‘warm fuzzies’) |
| 7 and 8 | Using respectful manners towards others: Listening to others  
Listen to other people who may have different views from their own (eg stop, listen, think, do techniques) |
| 9    | Using respectful manners towards others: Social conventions  
Social conventions of conversations with peers and school staff (eg please, may I, thank you, excuse me) |
| 10   | Using respectful manners towards others: Use of appropriate eye contact, tone of voice and volume when speaking to school staff and peers  
Non-confrontational tone of voice and volume and appropriate eye contact during conversations with school staff and peers |
In a number of cases, schools in the cluster bolstered such approaches with the use of specific values-related programmes, most notably Habits of Mind, Restorative Practices and the Virtues Programme.

Alternatively a more site-specific approach could be used, such as one school’s unpacking of the value of Responsibility by staff and the community as a means of facilitating learning experiences that allow students to develop and enact it in the context of caring for their local environment. More specifically, junior school teachers collaborated to design two projects that saw students from pre-primary to Year 2 working together:

- collecting aluminium cans from the local community for recycling, and then deciding to use the money raised to purchase citrus trees to plant in the school as a demonstration of ‘a cycle of sustainable development’;
- collecting recyclable cardboard materials from the community to create ‘hungry monsters’ built around bins located in the school to encourage other students to place their rubbish in bins.

Aside from the obvious benefits to the environment of the school, this approach has, in the words of the school itself, ‘promoted collaboration between teachers in designing and evaluating learning experiences’. The two projects also have seen increased contact between the school and its local community, with significant positive feedback to the work the students undertook.

This, along with direct teaching techniques such as Circle Talk in a number of cluster schools, has revealed anecdotal evidence, at least from staff and community members, that student learning has ‘shown an improvement’, particularly as ‘students improve their behaviour and display their values’.

Certainly staff have indicated, according to the cluster’s final report, that ‘they can now discuss items in greater detail and employ a range of cooperative learning strategies and group work situations’. As much as anything else, it should be noted, this reflects the greater willingness of staff to change practices as they ‘talk, role model and project their own behaviours and attitudes to students and parents’.

In a clear indication of how such outcomes can become self-reinforcing and hence sustainable over time, one cluster school typically noted how its

… strategic plan focused on teacher resources and student awareness as the two key components with teacher resources being purchased to complement the elevated profile of values in all aspects of school life …

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The school is encouraged by the benefits of the [Good Practice Schools Project] as evidenced by some key indicators including a measurable decline over the life of the project in the incidence of inappropriate behaviour directly linked to our targeted values. The students have demonstrated measurable improvement in their awareness of the need to be tolerant of others, to accept responsibility for their social interactions and their ability to communicate knowledge of the importance of values in our school community. Behaviour management data confirms that students are increasingly gaining positive acknowledgement of their capacity to model values. In addition, the school has commenced the acquisition of resources that provide teachers with a wide range of strategies to support the learning programme and underpin other key plans that operate in the school including behaviour management and inclusive education …

Through our participation in the [Good Practice Schools Project] our school has been able to establish a sustainable approach that will use a combination of resources purchased, language developed and simple techniques such as newsletter items, student reward activities and modelling to continue the momentum.

It is momentum the schools in the cluster feel can best be maintained not only in their own context, but also across the nation as a whole, if:

- programmes target specific values outcomes;
- these targeted values are matched to the school context, using a quality survey instrument to gain baseline information;
- a whole school approach is used that engages parents, students, teachers and the community;
- the project is included in a broader school improvement plan and is adequately resourced;
- the values identified are incorporated in school policy and operations;
- modelling of the values is encouraged throughout the school, especially by the staff;
- students are engaged in meaningful ways;
- teachable moments are used to embed the values;
- networking and cluster opportunities are in place to keep activity on track and share information, good practices and experience;
- we acknowledge that such change needs to be persistent, consistent and will take time.

**Key messages**

1. Poor parental attendance at values education forums and meetings does not necessarily mean that parental enthusiasm or support is low. Many parents prefer their involvement in values education to be via their children’s classroom teacher rather than at formal meetings out of school hours.
2. One successful strategy schools have used for engaging with and connecting to their communities is to make a value a feature of everything for a week/month and let it drive everything else in the school. This is even more effective when schools reach out through their newsletters to get parents involved and suggest things they can do at home to support the school’s values education approach.