The Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 1


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.

Promoting relational learning through values education

The Maroondah North Cluster (Vic) sought to identify universally acceptable behaviours as the basis of implementing values education in the schools, with a particular emphasis on relationships in the learning process.

Maroondah North Cluster, Victoria
Cluster coordinator: Catherine Blackburn, Norwood Secondary College
Participating schools:
• Croydon Hills Primary School
• Kalinda Primary School
• Mullum Primary School
• Park Orchards Primary School
• Warranwood Primary School
• Wonga Park Primary School
• Yarra Road Primary School
• Norwood Secondary College
• Parkwood Secondary College
UAN critical friend: Dr Helen McGrath, Deakin University, Victoria

Already in its fourth year as a cluster working on state-based middle years improvement programmes, the Maroondah North Cluster of nine schools sought to identify ‘universally acceptable behaviours’ as the basis for implementing values
education in the schools, but with a particular emphasis on relationships in the learning process.

In doing so, they drew heavily on the input and advice of Dr George Otero from the Centre for Relational Learning who provided professional development input to the schools underpinned by his following belief (quoted in the cluster final report):

*Effective, healthy learning occurs in relationship to community rather than in isolation. Learning is not restricted to educational institutions, it occurs in communities and workplaces just as frequently. Thus, if a person has the skills to navigate the relational elements of the learning experience, he or she can carry those skills from classroom to classroom, to non-traditional learning environments, to work, and to the larger community with success and confidence as well as the ability to function in the current world of increasing change and challenge.*

The challenge the cluster undertook in this context was to determine ‘How can teachers further develop relationships to promote student learning?’, on the basis of Otero’s five student learning relationships of:

- student to self;
- student to the subject matter;
- student to their peers;
- student to teachers;
- student to the wider community.

To address relationships in this way first required the schools to ‘lay the foundation stones’ of values since these ‘will be the basis for all relationships throughout students’ lives, enabling them to be effective community members’. The aim therefore was ‘to facilitate a cultural and pedagogical change which encourages students to see values as “roadmaps for life”’. This is readily evident in the overall process for the project the cluster devised, which is outlined in Figure 5.

**Figure 5: Cluster approach to promoting relational learning through values education**

| Values are the strong beliefs by which we lead our lives. |
| We reflect these beliefs in our actions. |

Nine Values for Australian Schooling have been listed in the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools*. We believe that six of these values fall into the category of *pro-social values*.

These are:
- Care and Compassion
- Fair Go
- Honesty and Trustworthiness
- Respect
- Responsibility and Understanding
- Tolerance and Inclusion.

Doing Your best is a personal achievement value.
Freedom as a value is addressed in civics and citizenship studies.

Integrity is the principle of acting in accordance with your values.

Our premise is that

1. Leadership (leading by example), partnership (working collaboratively with others) and friendship (recognising each other’s goals and roles) are the three elements required for good relationships.
2. When the pro-social values are translated into behaviours, this will ensure enhanced relationships.
3. Enhanced relationships lead to improved student learning outcomes. This is ‘relational learning’.

The adoption and translation into behaviours of pro-social values in our schools will be achieved through a process of

- discussion and analysis of the Commonwealth Government’s Values for Australian Schooling to establish common understandings between students, teachers, parents and the wider community;
- identifying the appropriate learning stage for teaching each value with clearly defined outcomes;
- developing ‘values curriculum’ that integrates the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) Physical, Personal and Social Learning strand to drive effective relational learning beliefs and practices;
- working cooperatively as a cluster to share good practice, share the workload, build momentum and have broader impact;
- professional development and support for promoting and developing dialogue in our schools.

and these actions

1. collection of baseline data;
2. consciously getting to know students: facilitating students getting to know each other and inviting students to get to know the teacher;
3. negotiating class norms for interaction;
4. refer to already established class norms and identify the values that underpin them;
5. using relational learning structures and procedures – eg sticks activity;
6. teachers facilitating ‘classroom meetings’;
7. engaging in ongoing and frequent ‘dialogue’ (exchanges of speaking and listening that lead to thought, learning and understanding);
8. explicitly teaching active listening skills;
9. using a variety of texts, such as books, audiovisual, songs and poetry that highlight values-rich issues;
10. providing opportunities for discussion and reflection on hypothetical and real situations involving moral dilemmas;
11. role-playing scenarios to practise pro-social behaviours;
12. explicit training in cooperative group work;
13. providing many opportunities for cooperative group work in different groupings;
14. developing student and community reciprocal links by exposing students to community opportunities through curriculum innovation (such as community service projects);
15. making use of significant dates to reinforce pro-social values (e.g., Anzac Day);
16. building awareness of non-verbal communication and the cultural differences in this form of communication;
17. making use of situational opportunities to highlight values being enacted.

resulting in

Communities rich in ‘social capital’

Communities rich in social capital are places where all children have opportunities to be successful emotionally, academically and socially. Ultimately, our society is richer in social capital as these children reach adulthood.

In practice, the implementation of this process first depended on getting the whole school community aligned and on side. In one school, for instance, this took the form of conducting a forum to which parents specifically were invited, where participants:

• were told that ‘a value is the strong belief by which we lead our lives … we reflect these beliefs in our actions’;
• then did a Think/Pair/Share activity on ‘Which values do you emphasise in your home?’ with these being written on separate notes;
• bundled these notes under the headings of the six pro-social national values (‘We found that all the ideas they had come up with fitted under one of the six – Respect, Responsibility, Care and Compassion, Fairness, Honesty and Trustworthiness and Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion.’);
• then stood in a line to show how they rated the importance of each value, which the school named a ‘values continuum’;
• (at the next session the following week) described the behaviours that corresponded to the given value using X charts about what it ‘looks, feels, sounds and thinks like at our school’.

In terms of curriculum, one of the schools spent time on its planning days ‘adjusting, modifying or completely revamping’ its units to include the Personal Learning and Interpersonal Development domains included in the new VELS learning strands. They also held a whole staff brainstorming session where they looked at each unit for the term to identify ways in which the values more readily can be linked to the
theme, such as Diversity into a unit on gold, or Care and Respect into a unit on ‘awesome’ animals.

A cluster secondary school has developed detailed values-based units linked to the VELS and based on generative topics, which are explicated in Figure 6.

**Figure 6: Sample for the generative topic, Different Faces, Different Races**
*(Teaching, Learning and Assessment Plan, Unit 1, Term 3)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Host VELS domain: Humanities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victorian Essential Learning Standards – Interwoven Strands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Domains</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and social knowledge, skills and behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civics and Citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Physical Education</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Course content**

Students explore the key aspects of the histories of cultural groups that make up their class, community and nation. Students consider various ways that people view each other on the basis of characteristics. These include observable characteristics such as gender, race, sexual identity, abilities and economic status, as well as more abstract features such as needs and aspirations. They examine their feelings about people who are different and consider the influence of stereotypes on their attitudes. They consider the impact of gender stereotyping in limiting what people do. Students discuss ways in which the behaviour, performance and attitude of an individual might affect and be affected by their role in a group.

**Understanding goals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content goals</th>
<th>Process (skills) goals</th>
<th>Value (life skills) goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>• Explain the contribution of different cultures to the growth of Australia’s diverse society</strong></td>
<td><strong>• Descriptions of cultural communities</strong></td>
<td><strong>• Awareness that other cultures are unique</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>• Work presentation of a different cultural community (headings, subheadings, drawings)</strong></td>
<td><strong>• Appreciation of the contribution of cultural groups in Australia</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>• Presentation and organisation of information</strong></td>
<td><strong>• Developing respect for differences and individuals</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Speaking clearly to a group
Listening to other opinions/finding out about interests/accepting views

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning sequence</th>
<th>Ongoing assessment and performances of understanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• What other cultural groups are there in Australia?</td>
<td>• Work presentation of cultural project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What are the common and distinctive features that make Australia a multicultural society?</td>
<td>• Box world display of different countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What are some of the traditions of other cultures?</td>
<td>• Travel brochure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How does a culture’s geographical position affect their way of life?</td>
<td>• Fact file</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How and why do other cultures use oral and written stories to portray values, beliefs and behaviours?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key terms
artefacts, author, beliefs, believe, dreaming, elders, epics, fable, folklore, generations, god, goddess, legend, medicine man, moral, morality tale, myths, narrative, narrate, narrator, oral, oral tradition, peace pipe, poet, poet laureate, prejudice, story, story teller, superstitions, totem stick, town crier, tradition, traditional (tales), writer, written

What does our classroom community look like?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning sequence</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Ongoing assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Week 1
Brainstorm cultural groups within Australia as individuals, pair/share and then whole grade | • collaboration  
• listening  
• brainstorming | Project |

Continued through Weeks 2–10

At a more direct teaching level, another school used ‘circles’ in a whole school session where students moved into multi-aged groups (P–6) for which every member of staff had a responsibility and which began in a circle with a specific dialogue activity. In addition, the Year 6 teachers conducted an audit of teaching practice which subsequently led them to develop an environment where students are part of the whole Year 6 area, and hence can move between classes to connect to another significant adult, rather than being restricted to just one class.
And then at the more symbolic level, one school is using *Bounce Back!* books as the basis of its values curriculum. Everyone in the school works on the same value for a fortnight and a student in each class is given a values certificate to acknowledge the particular value. These certificates are distributed at whole school assemblies and acknowledged in the newsletter to demonstrate the importance of values to the school community.

As a further expression of care and compassion on a global scale, schools participated in the Samaritan’s Purse project, ‘Operation Christmas Child’. In excess of 100 boxes were prepared across the cluster for recipients in Cambodia and Aceh, Indonesia this Christmas. As the cluster explains:

> Many teachers across the cluster expressed enthusiasm for the huge range of learnings their students were able to experience through their involvement in this project. Many teachers were also touched by the responses of individual students and families, for whom this appeal really captured their spirit of compassion. Our students have had a special opportunity to demonstrate selfless care and compassion on a global scale with an appeal where all the administrative costs are up front and they can see exactly what the recipients will receive. All schools involved have expressed their desire to be involved in 2006. On a local scale, many of our schools are participating in the Salvation Army tinned food appeal.

Professional development has underpinned all of this activity with, as foreshadowed earlier, the programmes attended with George Otero playing an especially important role. The third day of Otero’s relational learning professional development proved particularly important, not only for its content, but for the way in which it helped ‘reignite the momentum’ after the Christmas holiday period and allowed for other staff to ‘join the journey and be enthused’.

The cluster subsequently has used three data collection instruments to determine the impact of the project, comprising:

- X charts that examine ‘what does … look like, sound like, feel like, think like’, which was recommended by their university associate;
- an attitudes-to-self survey developed by one of the cluster schools with internal developmental assets identified by the Search Institute;
- a ten-point Likert scale survey for students to indicate the importance they attach to each of the national values in terms of how they live their lives.

The final data which was recently collected from these three items has, according to the cluster schools, ‘produced some affirming results’; to the point they are ‘convinced of the value of our recent interventions to classroom practice and will certainly continue in this vein beyond the formal life of the VEGPS project’. It is only strengthened by the fact teaching staff are reporting fewer classroom management
problems as the students seem to have increased awareness of their conduct and a commitment to uphold commonly agreed values.

Such continued activity will be underpinned by a resource guide/kit the cluster has developed and distributed to all schools which continues to grow as more resources are located, trialed and validated. The kit includes a comprehensive booklist of children’s fiction categorised according to the value for Australian schooling featured.

All members of the project have received in-service training in relational learning strategies; consequently their usage is high. This is immediately apparent from such typical student comments from cluster schools as:

- This year circle activities have made me feel more confident, helped me get to know people better, made me feel happy, helped us resolve issues … helped me get to know people especially at the beginning of the year, helped me talk about things that bother me. [Year 3]
- It’s fun acting out the stuff [in role-plays], but you have to think of a good script. [secondary student, to which another added] It makes you think, and the play is better if you do make it more complicated.

As a result of participating in dialogue and circle activities students who find difficulty articulating their thoughts and feelings in the written word are developing speaking and listening skills that enable them to demonstrate considerable intellectual capacity in other forums. At a recent ‘fishbowl forum’ held at one school, for instance, Years 5 and 6 students conducted a discussion about the importance of values in their school community while their parents looked on. ‘Students were able to articulate their beliefs and understandings to an impressive standard … [and] Parents then engaged in dialogue with the students and each other … [in an activity that] has served to explore further understandings of which values are important to this school community’.

Reflecting on the whole project experience, cluster leaders have identified four key factors they see as central to their success:
1. their invitational approach;
2. their emphasis on a shift in pedagogy rather than yet another programme;
3. their recognition that rich values themes underpin most curriculum and therefore are readily incorporated into classroom learning;
4. their firm belief that commonly shared understandings of values are core to developing positive relationships in school communities.

As they expand in their final cluster report:

We believe that in order to succeed, a project of this nature needs to be invitational. Unless a person is inclined to actively improve relationships, it is difficult to tell them...
that they have to and less likely to expect that this will occur … The level of enthusiasm of members of the Implementation Team has been infectious and has ‘spread the word’ to others across the cluster – our Implementation Team has since grown by approximately 20 teachers.

We are very firm in the belief that if values education is to be sustainable it should not be ‘packaged’ as a programme, but rather, should be approached as an evolution of teacher pedagogy. In this way it is less likely to be regarded as an ‘add on’ and less likely to be ‘taught’ in a contrived fashion with no specific linkages to the whole school programme/culture/identity.

Through our work we have raised the consciousness of values in our school communities. Teachers are more aware of the implicit values in the curriculum they teach and are actively highlighting these with their students. Students have a greater understanding of what values look like, sound like and feel like. The momentum among staff has grown with many asking about or trialling strategies and ideas.

The current implementation of the new Victorian Essential Learning Standards is very timely for our project because teachers are in the process of reviewing curriculum. Most curriculum content is already rich in values themes, but the values learning is rarely made explicit. Since curriculum and pedagogy are inextricably linked, teachers are also having to review their practices. This has therefore been very opportune for the explicit inclusion of values curriculum and pedagogy in our schools …

The drive and support for the change we seek needs to come from school leadership. We are providing a briefing for principals this week on our progress to date. In doing this we expect to maintain their continued enthusiasm and support for the project. Without this, the changes that we are seeing will remain in isolated classrooms and not become a school-wide and cluster-wide change.

Key messages

1. Discussion and analysis of the National Framework can help establish common understandings between students, teachers, parents and the wider community about the values that guide the school.

2. Identify the appropriate learning stage for teaching each value with clearly defined outcomes at each stage. There is, in this context, a variety of values-rich resources, such as books, audiovisual materials, songs and poems, on which teachers can draw.

3. The significance of relationships in the learning process and striving to actively develop these relationships cannot be underestimated. Consciously get to know students, facilitate them getting to know each other, and invite them to get to know the teacher as well.

4. Seize on situational opportunities that arise to highlight values being enacted at the time and seek to give students a voice.

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
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5. Negative school rules can be abolished in favour of positive ‘codes of conduct’ founded in values.

6. Effective, healthy learning occurs in relationship to community rather than in isolation from it.

7. Professional development and support to promote and develop values dialogue in schools requires a conscious mix of information and learning exchange and action based on what has been discussed.

8. Work cooperatively as a cluster to share and enjoy good practice, share the workload, build momentum and have broader impact. If it is assumed that the mere formation of clusters will lead to success, then those clusters simply will fail.