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.*


## Teaching it well

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

### Teaching social skills

The Territory Tribes Cluster (NT) used Tribes TLC® as the overarching framework for explicit values teaching with links to the Northern Territory’s EsseNTial Learnings and the National Safe Schools Framework.

**Northern Territory Tribes Cluster, Northern Territory**

**Cluster coordinator:** Learne Dunne, Henbury School

**Participating schools:**

- Anula Primary School
- Batchelor Area School
- Henbury School
- Humpty Doo Primary School
- Stuart Park Primary School
- Wallace Rockhole School
- Wanguri Primary School

**UAN critical friend:** Margot Ford, Charles Darwin University, NT

The Northern Territory Tribes Cluster fixed on using Tribes TLC® as its overarching framework for teaching values in explicit ways that also link to the implementation of the Northern Territory’s own EsseNTial Learnings (ELs) and the National Safe Schools Framework endorsed by MCEETYA in 2003.

With several cluster school leaders and teachers already having participated in Tribes training, the seven disparate schools involved in the cluster, ranging from a remote one-teacher school located on an Indigenous outstation to schools in the suburbs of Darwin, saw it as the ‘common thread’ for taking locally determined values to the classroom.
More specifically, the cluster felt that with its series of ‘powerful teaching strategies … in terms of social skills, team work and collaboration’, and its ‘dynamic series of school and classroom processes … that can be used across all areas of the curriculum’, Tribes strategies could ‘ensure the development of teaching and learning of national and community values and the growth of professional learning communities that focused on building safe and supporting school environments’.

What is more, by using the project to train a substantial group of Northern Territory teachers in Tribes, the cluster would be helping to ensure that the approach is sustainable over time and not dependent on a few key teachers, and hence vulnerable should they leave.

Cluster activity in this context was consciously located at three interrelated levels:

- **Macro cluster processes** – The cluster met regularly, albeit with some difficulties occasioned by distance, to contribute to developing the cluster as a ‘professional community’ where progressively more teachers, parents and even students could become involved and have a say. These meetings not only oversaw the training of teachers in Tribes, to the point where 59 staff from cluster schools now have been trained, but also focused on ‘sharing of stories describing aspects of project implementation including collection of relevant evidence’. All project steering group members also participated in Valuing the EsseNTials workshops in September 2005, where they mapped the national values to the Territory curriculum so the links between them are clear.

- **Macro individual school site activity** – Each of the schools developed its own action plan for the implementation of values education centred on Tribes, with the result that some even revisited and revised their pre-existing values statements. School plans focused in particular on the development of a common language of values to inform pedagogy, aligned to the Tribes terminology of attentive listening, mutual respect (others, things, yourself), right to pass and appreciations – no put downs. Parents were engaged by schools in a variety of ways, including as active participants in school-level discussions that shaped the articulation of the values of cluster schools. Three parents from across the cluster actually participated in Tribes training themselves and some schools conducted specific workshops for parents on the programme and its approach.

- **Micro activity at the classroom level** – Students became involved in the project in a variety of ways and their feedback was sought through surveys, discussion, role-plays, and more on their understanding of the national and school values and what they ‘looked, felt and sounded like’ at each school. A
A wide range of teaching and learning strategies and activities were trialed and implemented by teachers in their classes including:

- formal introductions to the core Tribes agreements and what they mean;
- a major focus in classes on the use of ‘community circles’;
- the use of Tribes strategies to set up a classroom debate involving all students when, in a unit on the Olympic Games, students raised the issue of drugs in sport;
- the use of a ‘talking stick’ to structure the taking of turns and explicitly teach attentive listening in class.

An indication of the sort of impact Tribes had at the (macro) school level can be seen from the action plan of one school where key statements from the plan now call for ‘a Tribes section to be written and included in the parent handbook and an explanation given to parents at the enrolment meeting; the Tribes agreements and philosophy to be incorporated into the behaviour management policy; and all teachers to explicitly teach the agreements to their students and use the language of the agreements in their teaching’. It may be even more evident still in the following extract (Table 12) from another school’s cluster plan for 2006.
Table 12: School Strategic Plan – Tribes (extract)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whole school strategic plan 2006</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Who is responsible</th>
<th>When (the timeline)</th>
<th>Monitor/evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tribes/Values education</td>
<td>Promote community awareness</td>
<td>Signwriter to write words and transpose student art work on to panels</td>
<td>AP to advertise student competitio n in newsletter to staff. Tribes/Values Team to select art work; AP to coordinate painting</td>
<td>End of Term 2</td>
<td>Values and agreement s displayed for all to see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paint school values and Tribes agreements on ochre panels in front of the office</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure agreements are displayed and used in all classrooms, resource areas and playground</td>
<td>Tribes manual, resources, trained staff</td>
<td>Tribes/Values Team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion, support, modelling and training for collaborative teamwork – both staff and students</td>
<td>Tribes manual, resources, trained staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This sort of activity in schools undoubtedly has led to more explicit incorporation of values into teachers’ work, as indicated by the shift in one school from 30–84 per cent agreement to a statement in the Configurative Mapping Tool that there is evidence the values are incorporated explicitly in the mission or charter of the school. This same school also experienced a positive swing of 27 per cent in the proportion of teachers who felt the values were explicitly incorporated in the teaching and learning programmes of the school. This in part may reflect the simple graphic developed by the school to convey its values to the community, which portrayed a single hand where the five fingers of ‘caring and encouraging’,
‘accepting others’, ‘showing respect’, ‘acting responsibly’ and ‘communicating effectively’ surrounded the open palm labelled ‘personal best’.

Inclusion of the values in the pedagogical strategies adopted by teachers primarily focused on the type of relationships formed in the class and the consequent ways in which teachers and students interact. This clearly can be seen in the following vignette from a Years 2–3 class:

During a group reflection on an activity, one boy was brutally honest – ‘in our group A got a bit angry’. This was the perfect opportunity to discuss in our community circle what happened and how everyone could make the situation better next time.

A parent had commented that the Tribes community circles were a very effective way of solving disputes and sticky situations, and volunteered to sit with her daughter A that night to discuss different choices she could make if she became angry again, to give her some discussion points for the upcoming community circle.

The next day, using the toy pelican as a ‘talking stick’ for reflections, students were keen to talk, as they wanted to hold the bird, but could only use it when speaking in our community circle. When the time came to discuss A’s situation, she was ready with her reflection on how she could make her next group activity more productive and cooperative. All students listened attentively as she was very open and honest about herself and how she had become angry with one student and then had taken out her anger on another student in frustration.

Having a supportive parent involved in this particular … activity was very encouraging, and allowed A to have the confidence to speak out honestly and to be a great role model for the class. We were then able to reflect on how our feelings affect the way we learn, how we can learn from our mistakes and how we can make better choices from that in the future.

Another school was equally focused on explicitly teaching the values-based Tribes techniques to improve students’ relationships and their overall capacity to learn.

Initially a lot of work was done on attentive listening with constant talking about what it feels like, looks like and sounds like (the Y chart). Students became very good at policing their own and others’ listening skills. When group work was being done requiring listening skills, all students were reminded of the listening behaviours required. During this time, many students became very good listeners, thinking about what was being discussed, read or watched and applying critical comments on the material.

Possibly the hardest agreement to implement was the Appreciations: No Put Downs. Students were easily able to identify the put downs, but found it difficult to express appreciations to their classmates. Some critical reflection by the teaching team led to the belief that students did not have existing experience with this and required extra incentive other than modelling to take ownership.
One of the extrinsic rewards was resurrected and modified. On giving their appreciation, the student then selected a sticker to give to the person they were thanking. The receiver was then able to put the sticker onto their chart. When the chart was filled, they were able to select a small prize from the box.

It is not surprising, perhaps, to find evidence in the cluster schools of children, to use the words of visitors to one of the schools, ‘really understanding the meaning of respect’. Certainly teachers are clear that behavioural incidents have decreased as students have become ‘more capable of managing their own behaviours’. In a somewhat different, though also related way, the development of a language to use to explain feelings and actions has proved especially important in one cluster school with a significant number of refugee children who have been through traumatic experiences of war and refugee camps.

This whole question of developing common language has, according to teachers involved in the project, been behind the sort of ‘fruitful discussions’ that lead to ‘real changes in behaviour’. It is most evident in such classroom-based activities as middle years students in one school brainstorming the meaning of values such as Responsibility, and Honesty and Trustworthiness resulting in, for example:

- Responsibility would look like doing your own jobs, everyone finishing their work.
- Responsibility would feel like everyone being proud of each other, we are doing our part.
- Responsibility would sound like kids having good behaviour, giving appreciations for good work.
- Honesty and trustworthiness looks like people giving you a special job, people liking you and wanting to be your friend.
- Honesty and trustworthiness sounds like people telling the truth, if you return something you will be thanked.
- Honesty and trustworthiness feels like you feel proud and happy, you feel successful and valued.

It even has translated into students’ speeches, seeking votes for the Student Representative Council, such as one girl’s call that ‘you should vote for me because I am honest, trustworthy and responsible’.

In a very real sense, the cluster schools believe that values education programmes, as represented by Tribes, add value to the range of existing programmes they had to strengthen students’ resilience. In particular, they have contributed to the sort of ‘consistency of conversations with school communities’ that ensure a shared language is used about values that then can be explicitly taught.

As one assistant principal put it, ‘the artefacts of our values are now more visible … [and] students are able to articulate how the Tribes agreements link to their

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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own behaviour, as the language of values is becoming part of the language of our community and teachers continue to plan for the use of values in their programmes’. Mutual respect in particular is expected and modelled in all interactions within this school community while, in another, a set of agreed teacher actions include scaffolded student discussion and role-play of each new value introduced in the class community circle discussion, with the result students act out what the value looks, sounds and feels like to them in their class and school environment.

Sustaining such a values focus and keeping it transparent in the culture of schools is, of course, a challenge the cluster concedes exists; especially since it ‘would be naïve to say that all in the school community are equally fervent about values education’. Nevertheless, as the cluster’s final report explains, there are some very enthusiastic champions within the schools who

… seize valuable teaching situations and plan consciously for values education and walk the talk of school values at all times … [In general it seems that] teachers who have participated in the Tribes TLC® training are more passionate and articulate about values education … Embedding values education and Tribes strategies formally in school policies is an effective vehicle for sustainability.

And the next step in this quest to build sustainability must be to not merely include parents in conversations and decisions to develop school values, mottos and the like, but to take them to the next stage of understanding how the school will actively teach values education through the processes of Tribes and what it looks like in classroom terms.

**Key messages**

1. There is a need to explicitly incorporate the National Framework principles into a whole school approach that links all aspects of policy, curriculum and learning. In this context, the nine values in the National Framework should be adapted by schools to reflect their particular environment.

2. Ownership of the development of the project means that schools develop shared understandings and common language of what the school values look like in terms of teaching, learning and assessment. Values statements can become just ‘words on a page’ and hold little meaning for staff unless they are collaboratively refined into a common language with a meaning that is shared.

3. Schools need to reflect on their values and reform them continually to keep values meaningful and real for all members of the school community.
4. Some teachers will be more passionate about values education than others. Passionate teachers seize valuable teaching situations, plan consciously for values education and ‘walk the talk’ of school values at all times. Less passionate teachers need to be supported and encouraged to take a more active interest in values education over time through professional development and sharing with colleagues who are taking the lead.

5. Professional learning and train the trainer courses such as Tribes TLC® can be used to enhance the development of values education understandings in the school. Though formal professional learning is important in values education, so too are ‘corridor’ discussions, sharing stories and other informal learning opportunities that arise.

6. Consultation is needed in school communities with culturally diverse groups to ensure their interests, practices and concerns are recognised and addressed. It may be necessary to use an interpreter to ensure that all people can articulate their own values and then fully understand what the national values look, feel and sound like in their own language.