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.

Developing youth leadership and stewardship

The Tasmanian State Secondary Colleges Cluster (Tas) sought to redress a perceived lack of student engagement in leadership and stewardship roles by identifying, developing and promoting civics and values learning opportunities available to its students.

Tasmanian State Secondary Colleges Cluster
Cluster coordinator: Dallas Williams, The Don College
Participating schools:
- Claremont College
- The Don College
- Hellyer College
- Hobart College
- Newstead College

UAN critical friend: Dr Sharon Pittaway, University of Tasmania, Tasmania

The Tasmanian State Secondary Colleges Cluster’s project focus really arose from its feeling that senior students in Tasmanian college communities were, as the cluster itself explains, ‘less engaged today in leadership and stewardship roles than they were previously’. There was, they believed, ‘a general lack of awareness of what opportunities for leadership and stewardship existed’ as exemplified by the following experience of the cluster coordinator from the lead school:

In my 2002 … class I had two students who had been very successful Head Prefects in a previous school and I asked why they had not nominated for the Student Representative Council … The discussion that followed led to a staff conversation about why many students, who had had extra curricular and leadership involvements, ceased leadership and stewardship roles after leaving Year 10.
In response, initially the lead school in its funded Values Education Study project in 2003–4, and then all cluster schools through this project, adopted a mapping model to identify civics and values learning opportunities that existed for their students to underpin the individual leadership and stewardship activity the different schools would pursue.

The common objectives the cluster sought to achieve in this context were to:

- map current youth leadership and stewardship opportunities in Tasmanian college communities;
- model effective youth leadership and stewardship styles;
- develop youth leadership and stewardship capacity;
- research different models of youth leadership and stewardship;
- research reasons for the ‘drop off’ in youth leadership and stewardship;
- seek models for opening up youth leadership and stewardship opportunities to create a capacity to develop ‘good’ citizenship among Australian youth.

This also, the schools noted, linked well to the outcomes of the Tasmanian Education Department’s Post Year 10 2004–5 Curriculum Review which had, as one of its key learning elements, Working Within the Community, which is described in Figure 34.

**Figure 34: Working Within the Community (extract)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working Within the Community – Primary Links to:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Connectedness</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Diversity</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Integrity</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Purposes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ensuring that students have a respect for, and acceptance of others</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Enabling students to be active citizens within a community</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Empowering students to contribute to sustainable futures at a local, national and global level</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ensuring that students have the capacity to work effectively with others and in teams</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Forming and maintaining positive working relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Actively participating in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding the interdependent nature of our world and valuing its</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learners and Learning in the 21st century

- Family
- Citizenship
- Awareness
- Involvement
- Responsibility
- Relationships

Features of Community Learning

Connecting with the community can and will occur at a number of levels and in a variety of contexts.

- **ABOUT** the community – at the informational end of the spectrum. It’s about ‘knowing’ – how to access and use information about community services, norms, protocols, issues, expectations, opportunities, diversity …
- **IN** the community – this is about ‘experiencing’ the community. It is about being part of a community, real or virtual. It involves active participation and commitment, networking and making connections. It develops outcomes for the students and leads to better learning and understanding.
- **FOR** the community – this involves ‘serving’ the community. This is linked to meeting community needs and involves outcomes for the students and the community.
- **WITH** the community – at the transformational end. This involves ‘shaping’ the community. It involves students seeing themselves as being responsible to and for their community and being active citizens within their community. It is transforming for both students and the community.

For students in Years 11 and 12 to be active participants in their community they need to operate in the ‘in’, ‘for’ and ‘with’.

The mapping that occurred in this context involved researching and compiling a statewide list of student leadership and stewardship opportunities to then provide to students in the form of a ‘calendar of opportunities’ they could pursue. The detailed information collected in the calendar subsequently also has led to daily news/information sheets for staff and students advertising these opportunities, intranet access for students in all colleges and the nomination of staff to work with students encouraging them to become involved.
With this as the base, the particular leadership/stewardship project undertaken by each school was developed to relate to its own particular objectives, areas of specialisation and student needs. More specifically, the projects covered:

- a focus on improving student leadership opportunities through technology and student-led online forums where, among other things, ethical issues of technology were addressed;
- attempts to engage gifted and talented students in values-based activity and work since they ‘often become the leaders in society and … need to have a values base … if the “common good” is to be achieved’;
- a focus on inclusion in the context of a support school being relocated to a project school’s site;
- efforts to embed values in the school’s overall pastoral care approach;
- using the school’s existing expertise in relation to sport to examine the implicit and explicit values involved, while increasing participation as well.

All of the projects have been underpinned by significant whole cluster professional learning opportunities for staff and the school community as a whole around the National Framework and what it means, including in-college discussions, forums and surveys, and targeted professional development workshops. The discussion initiated has been taken back to individual schools as well with one, for instance, dedicating a section of its Wednesday meeting slot to this professional learning and another holding fortnightly discussions on it over a period of six months. The upshot is that all colleges indicated, as the cluster’s final report notes, ‘that the framework proved to be a catalyst for conversation, a coat hanger for ideas, and a platform from which to build the projects’.

Beyond this, the network developed as part of the project itself has emerged as a valuable means of sustaining their collective values education approach. The network, it was explained,

… will self-support in that it provides collegial support for individuals within the network, encourages others to join the network and provides a database of ‘experts’ who are now informed and available to undertake the facilitation of professional development for schools and colleges as required. On reflection, this has been a powerful outcome of the process.

Though it is too early yet to quantify the impact on student learning or even attitudinal change, some anecdotal evidence already is beginning to emerge about the positive impact for students involved, as evidenced in the following brief commentary from one of the cluster school reports:

Positive feedback from peers and staff to the Forum Leaders saw the self-esteem of the Leaders grow as they came to know themselves better and became more aware of the capacities they possessed. The Teaching and Learning Team commented on the

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stronger and more trusting student-to-student relationships that started to be reflected in the online forum groups and through the pastoral care tutor groups. Forum Leaders were seen to be developing skills in organisation, monitoring and assessment of situations, and their capacity to follow through was primarily as a result of enhanced relationships.

Key messages

1. The National Framework can be a catalyst for conversation about values education and its implementation in schools; ‘a coat hanger for ideas and a platform from which to build projects’.

2. Establishing clear leadership groups within schools is important for achieving project success. It is important in this context to involve students in leadership and decision making in the school, and for teachers to be prepared to let go for this to occur.

3. Management of cluster operations works best when there is frequent communication between the cluster schools.

4. Critical friends can play a key role in providing an objective view on project processes and outcomes.