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

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.

Learning how to be: Values for learning and life

The WITS Cluster (Vic) saw teams of teachers working together to improve students’ learning in the middle years, with a strong focus on developing social capacities to competently live in ‘an exciting, diverse, increasingly uncertain and changing world’.

WITS Cluster, Victoria
Cluster coordinator: Kelvin Botrell, Werribee Secondary College
Participating schools:
- Iramoo Primary School
- Thomas Chirnside Primary School
- Werribee Primary School
- Werribee Secondary College
UAN critical friend: Dr Merryn Davies, Victoria University, Victoria

The four schools comprising the WITS Cluster in the western Melbourne suburb of Werribee have, as part of a broader state-based initiative, had five teams of teachers exploring how best to improve student learning, particularly in the middle years of school.

The Learning How to Be Team, in particular, has taken a strong focus on values and clarifying the values around which school communities can coalesce and pursue common goals. This team is, therefore, the real focus of this report, rather than the other teams with which it constantly worked – ie Interdisciplinary Learning,
Learning How to Learn, X Factor (ie new ways of learning) and Keys to Excellence teams.

The challenge the schools sought to confront through the work of these teams was probably best outlined by the cluster’s university associate when she explained that

… although ‘good kids’, well meaning and willing to learn and wanting to do the right thing … [many students in the schools] do not receive or have not received guidance in some quite fundamental areas where schools might assume knowledge to be already acquired – for example in social interactions, in the behaviour of manners, in social expectations, or understandings.

One example … occurred when three Grade 6 boys were waiting in the administration area of the school’s office and were taking up the limited seating (one couch) available … Also waiting was a very solid middle-aged woman who had an appointment with one of the principals. When the principal asked the boys to give the woman a seat, they obliged, with some looks of surprise. Some time afterward, she asked the boys what they had made of that incident and whether they understood why she had asked them to let the woman sit. They expressed puzzlement – ‘after all, we were there first’ – and she recognised that no-one had raised with them the idea that children or young people should offer a seat – or other deferment – to unknown adults.

… The values education programme of the schools is based on the belief that the school needs to be the place for this sort of learning, so important for students’ management of social interactions … As such, the principal emphasises values as being one of the key areas where schooling can and will make a difference if judiciously and consistently applied … She wants her students to be ‘decent individuals and good members of the community’.

Learning how to be for this cluster of schools means, therefore, students and staff developing ‘social capabilities and capacities to competently live in an exciting, diverse, increasingly uncertain and changing world’. The schools are, in this context, seeking to ensure that all their students have the skills and sensibilities to be ‘independent and interdependent team workers and leaders, contributing as positive, responsible citizens with a sound understanding of their own identity, whether it be in the context of themselves, their community or globally. Values, the cluster notes, ‘promote personal, social, emotional and intellectual development so that they can be confident in meeting the challenges in a local, national and global community’.

The Learning How to Be Team of teachers established to pursue this goal contained representatives from each of the cluster schools who, among other things, visited each other’s classrooms to examine the differing roles of values in learning and school life. To give meaning and structure to the task, the team developed a shadowing pro forma, which is illustrated in Figure 2, with information recorded by one secondary teacher who visited a primary class.
**Figure 2: Teacher shadowing/Visits by Learning How to Be Team (sample)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>What did you learn?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School:</td>
<td>From the day, I found that J was given little time throughout the week to get all the necessary work completed. Even though he was meeting the class requirements, it seemed that he would benefit from more hours in the classroom and allow the class to complete more activities in length. I also learnt that primary school teaching was dominated by females in the workplace and gave me an understanding of why it is said that there is a shortage of male teachers. The manner in which you communicate the values and how there seems to be more support for students (eg pastoral care). Students interacted just like students here, but I did realise that they are much smaller than students at secondary, and can feel for some of the smaller kids coming up. It must be daunting for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed date of visit:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of the venues you intend to visit:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose of the visit</strong></td>
<td><strong>What are you going to do in your classroom?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Investigate new learning and working relationships</td>
<td>The Literacy Circle, I have heard of this idea but not seen it in action. I thought this was quite a good idea and will definitely bring sections of this into the science and maths classroom. Especially the vocabulary section and the Connector. The values were interesting and I should include these more. It was also interesting how the board was set up. The Learning Outcomes on the board, I have already used with a class, while explaining an assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Developing/implementing values</td>
<td>✓ Social competencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Social competencies</td>
<td>All of the above. This day also allowed me to view primary education first hand. Before this day, I had not come in contact with a primary class or classroom. The school values were displayed prominently and referred to by the teacher and students to reflect on work or if issues arose.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| What data (evidence) are you going to give back to your exchange teacher and team? (Please tick) | |
| Student work samples | I will be trying to give J a wide experience on a secondary community. With a range of lessons, yard duty and the wide variety of options that are available. |
| ✓ Teacher observation notes | |
The team also surveyed local employers, teachers, parents and students to ask:
- What is important when people live, work and learn together?
- How do people learn in today’s world?
- What have been people’s best learning experiences, in or out of school?

This, together with the principles in the National Framework, guided the team in auditing current programmes in schools for values, identifying current strengths and areas for development, developing action research processes in and with the community, and reflecting on discipline practices, review policies and plans for future work.

One particularly interesting strategy adopted by the cluster in this context was to have the Learning How to Be and other teams present the findings of their work to an expert review panel the cluster established for feedback and advice.

The WITS panel of experts comprised:
- four community representatives – a councillor, a pharmacist, an engineer and the executive officer of the Local Learning and Employment Network;
- five leading national and international education thinkers and researchers;
- the four school principals.

The expectation was that the teams should present the focus of their work, the strategies they used, the findings of their investigations and the evidence for those findings over a full day with the following format.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>Panel meets for coffee or tea and introductions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary Learning Team presents (approx. 30 mins, panel questions team and provides feedback, panel discusses team’s findings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.30</td>
<td>Morning tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.45</td>
<td>Learning How to Learn Team presents (approx. 30 mins, panel questions team and provides feedback, panel discusses team’s findings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.45</td>
<td>Morning tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>Learning How to Be Team presents (approx. 30 mins, panel questions team and provides feedback, panel discusses team’s findings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>X Factor Team presents (approx. 30 mins, panel questions team and...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When it came to the work of the Learning How to Be Team, the panel commented on the ‘outstanding intellectual quality and the positive relationships between teachers in our schools … [and] supported the team’s recommendation to identify social skills that underpin our values’. The panel generated a great deal of reflection and analysis of the work of the team in the schools and the cluster intends to continue using this ‘presentation to experts’ approach. As the cluster report succinctly notes:

_The recognised education experts gave the panel intellectual credibility, the local community an opportunity to provide input to our work, and the school principals were able to reflect on where their schools are heading._

As a result of the whole experience, the cluster now has commenced work to identify the social skills that underpin their school values and has, among other things, sought to adopt a common student and parent friendly language for the way these values are described.

That said, the schools have also, to use the words of their university associate, ‘demonstrated interesting distinctions in their approaches to values education and student development’, in large part reflecting the different stage of development of values education they had reached. More specifically, their associate explained:

_Among the primary schools … [one primary school] can be characterised as focusing particularly on civics and behaviour and on managing its values education through this medium. [A second] on the other hand, has looked more to models of ‘quality schools’ in developing its own style of learning and teaching, and has highlighted themes of excellence and aspiration in its approach to values. At [a third], inclusiveness has been acknowledged as a major theme central to this school’s value system. The secondary college’s history over recent years has seen it reposition itself positively in the eyes of students and families in the community, not least through an articulation of a set of school-specific values which highlight effort, achievement and leadership. In all cases, schools draw on and are able to reference particular key sets of values incorporated within the National Framework …_

_One of the aims of this cluster-based values project has been the development of a common values language and if possible an agreed set of endorsed values common to the schools across the cluster. This common set has yet to emerge – and may not. What has transpired, however, has been the development of a strong and energetic values culture across the schools, characterised by collegial work of teachers in all schools, the targeted activities of joint working parties and participation by students and teachers across the cluster in joint values-based activities. As a consequence, at least two schools have taken_
the opportunity to consult with their communities to rework their essential school values over the duration of the project …

It is important to note that the cluster-based work has encouraged a cross-fertilisation of approaches and perspectives across the schools that has begun to ‘flatten’ distinctions between their approaches … Our ‘benchmarking’ exercise which documented schools’ approaches at the beginning and conclusion of the project has been able to identify development and progress in the implementation of values programmes in each school – in all cases informed by this exchange across the schools. Primary schools report a growing understanding of the need to structure experiences which actively prepare their students for the secondary environment; at the same time, the secondary school and its staff are building relationships in their classrooms which reflect the positive and supportive environments of the primary settings. These approaches are directly attributable to the cluster-based work undertaken in the past year, including the experience of ‘teacher exchanges’ across school settings.

The ‘flattening’ referred to between the different approaches of the schools is readily evident in the following snapshots of activity arising from the work of the Learning How to Be Team and the panel feedback they received.

One primary school, where ‘inclusive philosophies and democratic practices’ have been featured for some years, worked to bring its values into learning contexts rather than seeing them as purely a tool for behaviour modification. This school, which has a relatively high proportion of students with disabilities enrolled as integration students, has focused on the four key values of Respect, Cooperation, Responsibility and Courtesy. It has developed a range of strategies and processes to integrate values into school practice such as:

- workshopping values themes with students intensively in the first term of the year to develop in-class values statements and rules, and build up ‘a repertoire of techniques to use to encourage good learning’;
- reinforcing this with weekly awards to students based on values and encouragement of staff in modelling positive learning behaviours;
- trialing some recently designed activities to further embed values into all aspects of school life.

Another school has translated its values into the following ‘ten not negotiables’ that all teachers use:

1. Take responsibility for your own actions, don’t blame others.
2. Where appropriate, use ‘please’, ‘thank you’ and/or ‘excuse me’.
3. Speak to adults (and everyone else) with respect.
4. Don’t ‘talk back’ to an adult.
5. Listen and do not interrupt when another person is speaking.
6. No put downs – be positive or be quiet.
7. No shrugging shoulders or rolling eyes.
8. When visiting a room, knock on the door and begin with ‘excuse me please’.

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10. Use a person’s name when speaking to them.

The school has then used the project to reflect on its core values with the result it has been able to refine these down to the three agreed values of Respect, Responsibility and Relationships, which it refers to as its 3 Rs. It subsequently has produced a brochure that highlights its mission and ‘cranks up’ what is recognised as important to the school.

This is part of a staged strategy aimed at first clarifying the values focus and then highlighting that focus in public ways. The upshot has been, according to the principal of the school, ‘a big turnaround’ in student behaviour. As their university associate observed:

> Although their catchment area has not changed significantly in the past several years, the documented behaviour of students has improved significantly, evidenced in vastly reduced incidents and discipline reports and suspensions. The school is [quoting the principal] ‘a much better place to be’. Children are ‘well behaved’, demonstrate improved self-control, relate better to each other and, most significantly, share with teachers a common language of expectations of values. Other evidence of this change in the social environment of the school is the significant rise in parental satisfaction – across all measures in the past two years.

The outcomes have been positive according to this school because it, in common with its cluster collaborators, has been very clear in its support of the values framework adopted and in being seen to adhere to, and live by, those values. The values are ‘clear, easy to understand and are clearly mandated’. Students, teachers and parents have a clear understanding about expectations, and there is ‘no apology’ for adhering to these. As the school’s principal explained:

> Get your values right: make them clear and put them everywhere! In the classrooms, in the staffrooms, in the newsletters. And don’t be afraid to say what you don’t accept. Don’t make apologies.
> We developed a set of non-negotiables in 2004. It was very successful and well supported within the school. The staff actually insisted that this be repeated this year. Some of the children who come here don’t get a lot of consistency in their lives at home. Here they can be confident that things are consistent and fair and that is incredibly important to them.

It is an approach the university associate sums up as essentially involving the key factors of:
- simplicity and clarity of values;
- visibility of those values;
- embeddedness of those values in the operation of the school – they are not ‘add ons’, but are highlighted as integral to the way the school is run.
The third of the primary schools arguably is the ‘strongest centre’ for values education in the cluster and serves as something of a ‘model, pathfinder and guide’ to the rest. Established only 14 years ago, the school felt it was losing its way after five or six years. To address this situation it enlisted the help of a Quality in Schools Programme, which subsequently gave way to a whole school approach with values at its heart.

This school spends significant time at the start of each year working with students on its values and what really has meaning to them. More specifically, each classroom comes up with a set of ‘basic tenets’ and children vote on these. These are then narrowed down to a set of 12 whole school qualities, and narrowed further again as any duplication is removed. The upshot is an agreed set of values across the school – which in 2006 are Excellence, Communication, Respect, Honesty and Friendliness – which are outlined in every classroom and highlighted in communications such as the school newsletter.

Since adopting this approach, which recently has been supplemented by a decision to introduce Tribes TLC® (discussed in detail in the section ‘Teaching it well’), the school has seen a ‘huge change’ for the better, especially in the area of student behaviour. As the school itself explains:

Students know how to work with others, are much more familiar with school values and understand the language and discourse of values. This is apparent in feedback the school receives from members of the more general public (not even the school community) … Observers feel students are respectful of each other, respectful of adults and much better at communicating in an appropriate and effective way.

The school also has documented improved academic learning trends since implementing values education, though it is difficult to pinpoint exactly the cause because of the complementary use of the Quality Learning approach and Tribes. That said, the school leadership team is in no doubt that the values education programme in use has meant:

- more effective cooperation among students as they go about learning or sharing learning;
- teachers focusing more on guiding and acknowledging students’ initiative – ‘getting kids to want to learn’;
- a safer, more secure learning environment;
- better quality strategies used and students taught to articulate these;
- the creation of a ‘learning community’ which links learning and relationships in powerful ways.

Finally, the high school in the cluster used the project to redefine and simplify the school’s values as a result of students recommending a maximum of five values so they could retain them in their heads. From this new set of values, which incorporates the nine national values and the previous attributes and values of the...
school, a common language is being developed for describing ‘demonstrable actions and social skills related to each value’. The school’s assertive discipline policy has been amended to have a more positive focus and reflect the values of the school.

Even more importantly, perhaps, the values are beginning to be translated into a range of classroom programmes and activities being trialed by teachers in the school, such as the Years 9–10 drama work where

… students opted to illustrate some of their values work in developing short plays about a specific and problematic area – bullying. In this unit, they explored a range of scenarios which they might have experienced and were able to discuss implications and strategies. They workshopped ways of presenting these scenarios effectively and dramatically, using, among other things, ‘freeze frame’ techniques as a vehicle for building awareness of verbal and body language at particular points in social interactions – ‘What’s happening precisely here?’

The students then, in a reflection of the closeness that has developed between the cluster schools, took their show ‘on the road’ to local primary schools to help build values discussions among younger students.

This closeness was, by the end of the project, reflected in an ISLANDS for Learning Framework (Individual Supported Learning and Negotiation in Diverse Spaces) the schools have collectively devised, as a result of the work of all five teams, which focuses on ‘socially and intellectually engaging students in learning’ and includes ‘preparing students for learning through a values-laden pedagogy’. The schools currently are drafting examples for teachers on how to plan for and implement the framework, with the intention of studying its effect on student learning over the next 18 months.

**Key messages**

1. Developing a common language about values is important as a precursor for teaching those values. It is important in this context to clearly articulate the values of the school – ‘get your values right, make them clear and put them everywhere!’

2. Schools may choose to reduce the nine national values to a smaller, more manageable set. The important thing is to contextualise them to your particular school circumstances and needs.

3. A ‘staged’ process of teaching values can be an effective means of implementing values education in schools – ie a process whereby values first are taught, then reinforced, and then embedded throughout the curriculum.
4. Teachers have to practise the values they espouse, which sometimes means rethinking their approach to dealing with their students. A failure to ‘walk the talk’ sends a mixed message to students, which undermines values education in the school.

5. Using a panel of experts to whom teams of teachers present is a mechanism for gaining valuable feedback and engaging the community, which also can provide positive reinforcement for those involved.