At the Heart of What We Do
Values Education at the Centre of Schooling

The Final Report of the
Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2

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The cause of values education is essential, in my opinion, to Australian education. It is the ingredient that can make the difference to education in the Australian context. Students who attend a school where they feel secure from physical and psychological harm, who are met by teachers who model ethical behaviours and who require such behaviours from their students will achieve well in the academic sphere. Why? The answer is obvious. Because the students will be more emotionally stable; they will apply themselves to learning with greater alacrity; they will be more at ease with school personnel and will achieve greater self-discipline.

Background

In 2004 the Australian Government committed funding for a multifaceted values education initiative designed to support Australian schools in implementing the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools (the National Framework). As part of that initiative the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project (VEGPSP) was established as a two-stage undertaking to support selected schools from across Australia to design and conduct local projects that would identify and exemplify good practice in values education.

The aim was to demonstrate how the National Framework could help schools provide values education in a planned and systematic way, and as a core part of schooling. The work of the project schools involved in both stages was to be captured, reported on and disseminated to inform and guide all Australian schools in the task of improving practice in values education.

The Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 1 ran from 2005 to 2006. The Final Report described the endeavours of 26 school clusters and their 166 schools, and identified a set of key recommendations to Australian schools about the principles of good practice in values education (Curriculum Corporation 2006).

The Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2 built on and extended the work of Stage 1 into other school contexts. Stage 2 ran from 2006 to 2008 and involved 25 school clusters, comprising 143 schools from across the nation. The clusters designed and implemented their values education projects to meet their local needs and to further inform the development and uptake of good practice in values education in all Australian schools.

This Final Report provides an account of Stage 2 of the VEGPSP in three sections. Section 1 gives an overview of Stage 2: the way it was established, organised and conducted. Section 2 offers an analysis of the Stage 2 cluster projects and a synthesis of their key messages about good practice in values education. Section 3 presents a detailed synopsis of each of the Stage 2 cluster projects: their aims, processes, activities and outcomes.

About the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2

The Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2 was established and managed by Curriculum Corporation to work towards the National Framework’s vision of all Australian schools providing values education in a ‘planned and systematic way as a central aspect of their work’ (DEST 2005, p 3). Stage 2 sought to extend the work of the Stage 1 clusters by
demonstrating good practices for implementing values education. In particular, some of the Stage 2 clusters were selected to focus on the implementation of values education across all key learning areas and by addressing values in intercultural and global contexts.

In mid 2006 the then Minister for Education, Science and Training invited all Australian schools to apply for funding to undertake values education projects in Stage 2 of the VEGPSP. The projects were to use the National Framework to implement programs that met the needs of their local school communities. Schools were invited to form clusters of four to ten schools, to design projects and to apply in a competitive selection process for funding grants, which ranged from $45,000 to $100,000.

The final cluster projects were selected through a three-stage, criteria-based selection process. In the last stage, a National Selection Committee, chaired by Curriculum Corporation, recommended a final list of 25 cluster projects, which were announced in 2006 by the then Minister for Education, Science and Training.

A number of Stage 1 clusters were selected to extend their work into Stage 2 to enable observation of the impacts of longer-term values education work. All successful clusters pursued an array of approaches to implementing the National Framework, which added to the variety of projects seen in Stage 1. To name a few, one involved student action groups in leading a series of community events to highlight the values outlined in the National Framework. Another used a ‘kids teaching kids’ approach to adopt the values in the National Framework as part of a community capacity-building strategy. In a third, the values in the National Framework and pedagogy were linked to help create a shared sustainable vision of the future. A fourth integrated service learning as part of the teaching and learning experiences embedded across the key learning areas of English, studies of society and environment, and religious education. Another developed emotional literacy through restorative justice practices to help students value commitment, empathy and responsibility through the stages of development from middle childhood to late adolescence. Section 3 of this Final Report provides outline descriptions and summary accounts of key messages from each of the 25 cluster projects.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY: THE EVIDENCE OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Values Education Good Practice Schools Project was designed as a school-driven, ground-up approach to exploring values education practice in local schooling contexts. The project invited school communities with diverse backgrounds to conceive of their own values education projects and apply for grants to support their implementation. The intention was to create opportunities for schools to use the National Framework in their local contexts and for them to report on what they learnt. The project established ways of supporting, monitoring and gathering accounts of these diverse school experiences. The task then was to interpret these different experiences and distil generalisations of good practice in values education for other Australian schools.

To achieve this, Stage 2 of the project adopted a meta-evaluation methodology to identify values education good practices and their outcomes for the Final Report. The project did not adopt a centrally designed and controlled quantitative research methodology, with its associated control groups, uniform fields for data gathering and statistical analysis. Instead, a number of factors – the project purpose, the eclectic nature of the school project activity, the fact that each cluster designed their own projects to meet local needs, and the limited time frame for the project work – determined that a meta-evaluation methodology was the most appropriate approach to use in assessing and reporting on the project outcomes.

Accordingly, Curriculum Corporation employed a range of tools for the cluster projects to use in gathering information about their work and for both the schools and other project collaborators to use when reporting on their work to the project managers at Curriculum Corporation. These tools were case studies, case writing, University Associates Network accounts and supplementary accounts.
Case studies prepared by clusters

Project clusters submitted four interim reports to Curriculum Corporation: in December 2006, June 2007, December 2007 and a final report in April 2008. These reports took the form of case studies of the approaches used by individual clusters to implement their projects.

The case studies were constructed through an iterative process over four drafts, which passed between the school and Curriculum Corporation staff. The University Associates Network colleagues, Curriculum Corporation personnel and, in some cases, consultants engaged by clusters assisted with this drafting process. Each draft pursued a broad pro forma pattern that addressed context, purpose, process and outcomes to achieve an evidence-based account of good practice.

Case writing prepared by individual teachers within each cluster

All schools in each project cluster submitted four pieces of case writing from individual teachers in response to particular issues of professional practice in values education. Teacher case writing is a technique designed to encourage teachers to describe their practice, reflect on it, discuss it with colleagues and collaboratively attempt to improve it. The case writing provided accounts of good practice, which could be used to inform and improve the approaches of teachers engaged in values education in schools across Australia.

The University Associates Network accounts of good practice

To support the project, the University Associates Network (UAN) was established. Participating universities assigned a colleague from their education faculties to each cluster. The UAN ‘critical friend’ advised their cluster about implementing its values education project and applying the key elements and principles of the National Framework. UAN members provided their own objective accounts of the good practices witnessed during the course of the project.

Supplementary accounts

In addition to the case studies, case writing and UAN accounts, the project reporting was supplemented with reports from two other agencies who were engaged to support the cluster work throughout the life of the project.

The first of these was the state and territory values education officers, who supported the project and participated in meetings of the Values Education Networks of Engagement (VENEs). Curriculum Corporation established these networks in each jurisdiction to bring together parents, teachers and values education officers to support and promote values education activity at the educational jurisdictional level and thereby support a more integrated approach to the values education initiative, by conducting school forums and disseminating information and resources. The VENEs also provided an avenue to input the experiences and learnings of local teachers who participated in Stage 1 of the VEGPSP. At the end of the project each VENE provided a report about its contribution to the project.

The second additional agency was the mentor group. As part of its project support structure Curriculum Corporation established a group of mentors from Stage 1 to support clusters in Stage 2. The mentors were selected from experienced school leaders who had implemented successful projects in Stage 1. The role of the mentors was to provide advice and guidance on a needs basis to Stage 2 participants about ways of effectively implementing and managing their projects. By the end of Stage 2, five mentors had worked at different levels of intensity with fifteen clusters. These mentors provided Curriculum Corporation with a brief report on the mentoring activity and its outcomes.

IDENTIFYING GOOD PRACTICE IN STAGE 2 CLUSTER PROJECTS

In keeping with the interpretative research approach established for the project, Curriculum Corporation used a form of meta-evaluation to aggregate the findings from project reports.
Curriculum Corporation initially reviewed all of the report material, paying special attention to the outcomes that clusters, teachers and the UAN members were claiming had arisen out of the projects. Clusters or schools that were pointing to substantial improvement in outcomes such as student engagement, improved teaching practice, student and teacher wellbeing, and parental satisfaction with the school were identified. A panel of readers (which included the project managers and research manager at Curriculum Corporation) examined the nature and type of evidence offered to support the claims, and noted recurring themes. The reviewers then compared the Stage 2 cluster and school approaches to implementing their projects with those used and reported on in Stage 1.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN VALUES EDUCATION

On the basis of Curriculum Corporation’s meta-evaluation of the activity of the 25 Stage 2 cluster projects over 20 months, this Final Report identifies ten principles of good practice in values education for Australian schools. It is worth noting that many of the Stage 2 cluster projects provide evidence to support a number of the findings and recommendations to Australian schools about the principles of good practice in values education from Stage 1 of the VEGPSP.

A number of the Stage 2 findings about good practice directly reflect some of the Stage 1 recommendations to schools. Several of these have not been repeated as they are now widely understood as being self-evident principles for the implementation of quality values education approaches in schools.

Specifically, Stage 2 cluster experiences reaffirm:

- Recommendation 2 from the Stage 1 Final Report which asserts: ‘Values education is sustained over time only through a whole school approach that engages all sectors of the school community.’
- Recommendation 3 from the Stage 1 Final Report which asserts: ‘School leadership is critical in developing values education as a core part of schooling.’ (Curriculum Corporation 2006, p 2)

Other Stage 1 recommendations also reverberate in the Stage 2 experiences, but they have been reasserted in the following principles of good practice in recognition of the fact that the Stage 2 cluster experiences have added new insights and understandings about these good practices.

Other principles of good practice are new understandings about values education practice that were not obvious or evident in Stage 1 of the VEGPSP.

In summary, the following ten good practices in values education have been distilled from Stage 2 of the VEGPSP.

1. Establish and consistently use a common and shared values language across the school.

Establishing, articulating and disseminating a common and shared values language is essential to good practice in values education. In keeping with the Stage 1 findings (Recommendation 1), reaching agreement within the whole school community about the values that will guide the school’s work is the first critical step a school must take if it seeks to become values-centred.

In a values-based school the shared values language comes to inform everything that school does and says. It underpins pedagogy, leadership, planning, policy positions, curriculum practices and behavioural expectations. If there is no common values language, if the values within the school are neither owned nor shared by the school community, there can be no basis for implementing effective, planned and systematic values education.

2. Use pedagogies that are values-focused and student-centred within all curriculum.

Effective values education uses pedagogies that mirror the values being taught. A number of the cluster projects in Stage 2 clearly suggest that the most effective learning experiences in values education are generally values-explicit, student-centred and open-ended rather than values-implicit, teacher-centred and closed. The pedagogies engage students in real-life learning, offer opportunity for real practice, provide safe structures for taking risks, and encourage personal reflection and action.
Many of the cluster projects demonstrate that when values and students are at the centre of learning design, there are observable changes for the student, the teacher and the learning environment. These include calmer classrooms and happier students, students who are empowered, engaged, more responsible, confident and positive about their place in the school and wider community. This is values education at its best and contrasts with traditional didactic, teacher- and content-centred pedagogies, which are largely inappropriate for effective values education. A number of cluster projects would also suggest that values-focused pedagogies are required to support students to live as enabled and resilient individuals in the real world of the twenty-first century: a world beset with climate change, personal and societal insecurities, shifting certainties, rapidly changing forms of social interaction and intensifying intercultural and interglobal realignments.

3 Develop values education as an integrated curriculum concept, rather than as a program, an event or an addition to curriculum.

Good practice in values education requires schools to see values education as a whole of curriculum concept that informs all teaching and learning across the school. Values education is not a discrete program or part of an implicit hidden curriculum; it is a central principle underpinning the school curriculum offerings, the curriculum design, pedagogy, content and assessment. In this view (alluded to in Recommendations 2 and 4 in the Stage 1 Final Report) values education is neither an addition to be ‘bolted on’ to a curriculum nor a curriculum topic that resides in a humanities or religious education learning area. Values education is instead an approach to existing curriculum, a way of seeing curriculum that requires an integration rather than an addition. Many Stage 2 cluster projects demonstrate this principle of curriculum integration and system integration with existing jurisdictional curriculum frameworks, policies, priorities and other education initiatives.

4 Explicitly teach values so students know what the values mean and how the values are lived.

The Stage 2 cluster projects reassert the Stage 1 finding (Recommendation 4) that values must be explicitly articulated and taught. The Stage 2 experiences deepen our understanding of how critical this principle is in successful values education practice. The principle of explicitness applies more broadly and pervasively than has been previously recognised. It means that values-based schools live and breathe a values consciousness. They become schools where values are thought about, talked about, taught about, reflected upon and enacted across the whole school in all school activities. Values are explicitly taught across all key learning areas and articulated in all co-curricular activities. They are also explicitly present in the physical school environment, its signage, ceremonies and rituals as well as policies, administration and key documents. The explicit values become ubiquitous, and values ‘teaching’ and values ‘learning’ become part of the embedded consciousness within every school activity.

5 Implicitly model values and explicitly foster the modelling of values.

Stage 2 projects reassert the Stage 1 finding (Recommendation 5) that modelling is an integral component of successful values approaches. Stage 2 experiences add to our understanding of the operation and effects of this good practice. Once values are explicitly established within the school, the modelling implicitly reinforces the values learning. This principle applies equally to all relationships in the school, not just teachers modelling to students: teachers model to teachers and students model to students. Such pervasive modelling of values helps to create more positive classrooms and school cultures. Without this implicit values modelling, the task of implementing values education is doomed. If the seen-behaviours of teachers and felt-experiences of students do not correspond to the explicit values fostered in the school community, the explicit values education becomes compromised, incongruent and less effective.
Develop relevant and engaging values approaches connected to local and global contexts and which offer real opportunity for student agency.

The Stage 2 cluster experiences speak convincingly of the critical importance of enabling and providing opportunities for student agency. Although present in many of the Stage 1 projects, the role of student empowerment and agency in values education practice has been significantly highlighted in Stage 2. Starting from the premise that schooling educates for the whole child and must necessarily engage a student’s heart, mind and actions, effective values education empowers student decision making, fosters student action and assigns real student responsibility. Effective values education is not an academic exercise; it needs to be deeply personal, deeply real and deeply engaging. In many of the Stage 2 projects students can be seen to move in stages from growing in knowledge and understanding of the values, to an increasing clarity and commitment to certain values, and then concerted action in living those values in their personal and community lives. The teaching and learning is three-dimensional and could not be more profoundly meaningful.

Use values education to consciously foster intercultural understanding, social cohesion and social inclusion.

Stage 2 speaks more specifically and extensively than Stage 1 on the use of values education to foster social inclusion within school communities. A number of cluster projects demonstrate how some of their values education practices can provide both the tools and the common ground for positively engaging with the diversity and difference that arises from a multitude of cultures, faiths, ethnicities, abilities, and geographic and socioeconomic circumstances, and which can marginalise groups from mainstream learning. These Stage 2 cluster projects show that values education is uniquely placed as a vehicle to work across these different forms of ‘divide’, and to provide opportunities for social inclusion, fostering social cohesion, developing intercultural and interfaith understanding, and engaging the disengaged.

Provide teachers with informed, sustained and targeted professional learning and foster their professional collaborations.

Stage 2 projects have further developed the notion expressed in Recommendation 6 of the Stage 1 Final Report that professional learning is crucial to successful values education. Stage 2 has clearly demonstrated how explicit values education professional learning – at a local, state and national level – can lead to transformed teacher practice. Professional learning can be the critical factor between success and failure in developing sustainable values-based schooling. The Stage 2 experience also firmly asserts the type of professional learning required: ongoing models such as the use of learning communities, objective critical friends, mentors, and collaborative peer exchange, as well as time for reflective practice.

In a message that is evident in Stage 1 (Recommendation 10) but even more pronounced in Stage 2, the ‘teacher as researcher’ model, with its collaborations between education faculty university educators, can be a ‘good practice’ in values education. These collaborations often involved a mutually beneficial partnership between clusters and universities to explore different approaches and knowledge pathways in implementing values education. The positive impacts of this collaboration on people and projects are evident in many of the Stage 2 cluster reports. School practitioners received the benefit of mentors and critical friends as well as one-on-one professional learning; the university teacher educators were formally connected to a substantial school-based teaching and learning project which could inform the training of new teachers and foster new academic research. The collaboration has also resulted in at least three major academic international publications and a major university-based research project on values education in Australian schools. These publications and the research activity have used a number of the cluster projects as case studies to explore new theoretical and conceptual thinking about the nature and effects of values education in schooling for the twenty-first century.
9 Encourage teachers to take risks in their approaches to values education.

The Stage 2 cluster experiences assert and often demonstrate that successful values education initiatives are positively disturbing and disruptive in nature. They can challenge familiar and traditional notions of the curriculum, the teacher role, the ways school operate, teacher–student relationships and the very nature of schooling. Good practice in values education, and the crucial professional development that it requires, encourages teachers to review their teaching practices at a fundamental and personal level. It can also disrupt established patterns of school operations as the school community becomes more values-centred. Curriculum offerings, resource allocations, parent relations and even timetabling may all be reassessed. All this can be confronting, and requires a variety of supports, the most powerful of which is a collegial community of practice.

10 Gather and monitor data for continuous improvement in values education.

In a move forward from Stage 1, and in concert with the guiding principles of the National Framework, the Stage 2 clusters were encouraged to attend more consciously to monitoring and evaluating the values education work. As the cluster case studies show, a number made significant efforts to develop empirical data based on a variety of measures and tools (climate surveys, test score comparisons, incident reports, staff surveys and the like) that would provide evidence of outcomes for students and for other sectors of the school community. Cluster experiences also suggest that positive outcomes in values education can be achieved through a continuous and supported action research cycle that monitors and evaluates the intended values education approaches among the teaching staff. The ‘plan, do, study, act’ cycle guides and fosters professional change, encourages reflection and supports the process of monitoring values education outcomes.

Conclusion

The ten good practices in values education identified here are not the total story of what the 25 Stage 2 project clusters have achieved. There have been many other good practices that different school communities have found useful and productive for their own contexts. This Final Report cannot possibly capture all the triumphs and magic moments that the 143 schools have encountered in their 20 months of intense project activity. Nor can it recount all the uncertainties, fluctuations, failings and frustrations that were also part of the baggage in many of these values education ‘journeys’. But despite the limitations, this Final Report gratefully acknowledges all the efforts of the thousands of teachers, principals, students and parents as well as the numerous academics and education system officers who have contributed to this work and the findings of the Stage 2 project.

On behalf of the wider Australian education community we thank them for their rich contributions to our growing understanding of what values education is and how we can best undertake values education in Australian schools for the benefit of our students and our communities. The Stage 2 Final Report voices the clusters’ testimony to the potential and actual transformative capacity of values education, its capacity to transform students, teachers and whole schools. It provides all Australian school communities with more evidence of the sorts of good practice that can bring values education to the centre of the whole purpose of schooling, to the heart of what we do in education.