The Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2 cluster project synopses

The following has been extracted from 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, August 2008.


The Broader Horizons Cluster
Tasmania

Expanding Horizons

Cluster coordinator: Melanie Hammond (to December 2007) and Amanda Singleton, Ridgley Primary School

Participating schools:
• Ridgley Primary School
• Cooee Primary School
• Waratah Primary School

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

Key messages
1 Values education is not a one-off set of lessons that can be delivered over time, but rather a ‘continuous approach across all learning areas, which provide ongoing opportunities to express, discuss, represent and learn about the many values which are critical to enriching and improving the lives of every individual’. Accordingly, teachers need to examine their own values and those of the school community before embarking on values education in classrooms.

2 Values education approaches and propositions allow teachers to examine their own values and how these values relate to their pedagogy. It is important that teachers recognise that values education is more than implementing a series of strategies to improve student learning. It involves a conscious ‘plan, do, study, act’ action research methodology that recognises and acknowledges when something is not working and points the way forward.

3 An artist-in-residence program is an effective way to engage students with a different culture and to support intercultural understanding through the core curriculum. A broad community engagement strategy with a shared values focus to consolidate values learning across the community is essential if messages learnt in classrooms are to be supported in other environments.

The main purpose of the Expanding Horizons project was to implement and sustain a culture of explicit teaching and learning of values within the cluster schools. The Broader Horizons Cluster schools are located in north-western Tasmania, in varying distances from the coastal port of Burnie. Because the region is largely monocultural, the cluster perceived a need to look outward in its curriculum approaches by engaging with a chosen country, in this case, Indonesia. The schools worked with Indonesian artist-in-residence Mr Samuel Indratma to develop a range of artwork and drama pieces. The activities were pathways for developing friendships, respect, tolerance, inclusion and understanding across the world. More specifically, the project sought to:
• implement and sustain a culture of explicit teaching and learning of values within the schools
• develop an awareness of values (as individuals, as community members, as part of the school community)
• build teacher capacity (confidence in their practice, capacity for reflective practice, broaden repertoire of strategies, to be ‘walking the talk’)
• improve student behaviours within the school communities
• build student capacity (for decision making, reflection, action, to articulate emotions and reactions)
• develop intercultural understanding of values (through explicit teaching, relationships, intercultural language learning).

During the implementation phase of the project, the cluster recognised a need to examine the schools’ values approaches. More specifically, they were interested to expand the focus of the project to:

- provide a broad range of opportunities to assist students to understand how values impact on the way we live, and relate to others.

The UAN adviser in the Broader Horizons cluster worked closely with teachers to support them to examine their personal and professional values. The approaches threw light on the need to make a purposeful transition from personal values to specific values-based teaching approaches. A powerful tool for assisting in this process is described in the UAN report and presented below. Teachers were asked to reflect on and respond to the following statements as part of a professional learning exercise:

TEACHING STATEMENTS

The literature says that ‘good teachers demonstrate an ability to transform and extend knowledge, rather than merely transmitting it; they draw on their knowledge of the subject, their knowledge of their learners, and their general pedagogical knowledge to transform the concepts of the discipline into terms that are understandable to their students. In other words, they display their pedagogical content knowledge … Good teachers show respect for their students; they are interested in both their professional and their personal growth, encourage their independence, and sustain high expectations of them’ (Ramsden, Margetson, Martin & Clarke 1995).

I believe everyone can learn.

There are common goals each student must achieve, but we can take different paths to reach these common goals. It is not the job of the teacher to force uniformity in learning. It is the job of the teacher to support individuality. Understanding and capitalising on the diversity of each student, allowing them to use their individual strengths, is paramount to good teaching.

I believe everyone wants to learn.

The secret is to find the right motivation. It must be kept in the teacher’s mind each student is different, so their motivations are different. Students are eager and energetic. With a little guidance in the right direction and a small push, they will seek out and discover the answers they are seeking. They will experience, first hand, the effects of their decisions. There is no better way to learn this than through first-hand experience. Students, guided by the teacher, will make some serious decisions. They will then experience, first hand, the effects of their decisions. This is all designed to prepare them for the real world.

My emphasis in teaching is on learning.

My teaching goal is to facilitate learning (helping students learn) and I believe that teaching plays a major role in that. Learning is primarily the student’s responsibility, whereas teaching is my responsibility. My emphasis is on helping the student to learn, rather than just dispensing my knowledge to them. I am there to ‘light their candle’, not just ‘fill their bucket’.

After these professional learning and teacher reflection activities were completed, a variety of learning experiences across the schools were implemented in classrooms. They focused on cultural diversity and respect.

Ridgley Primary School incorporated the Tribes Program, with a linked focus on Harmony Day, customs, farming and Indonesian life. The school adopted a prescribed approach to the explicit teaching of values. They discussed running a four-week focus on each focus value that would be taught explicitly in the classroom and reinforced throughout the school at any given opportunity, and communicated to parents and the wider school community.

Waratah Primary School’s Year 2, 3 and 4 class used a Y chart to explore the idea of responsibility during a lesson focusing on this value. This class felt that responsibility sounds like ‘manners’, ‘getting along’, ‘working quietly’, ‘busy’. In contrast, it felt ‘stressful’, ‘happy’, ‘lonely’, ‘scared’, ‘proud’, ‘respect’. Responsibility looked like ‘working hard’, ‘cleaning’, ‘being careful’, and ‘being upset (if you didn’t want to clean your room). Like the Ridgley class, the Waratah class
related their understanding of responsibility to school and home contexts.

In part of the program teachers combined the Waratah K–P–1 and Ridgley Prep–1 classes to encourage a shared learning experience and enable the two groups to work together more cohesively. The students were divided into two groups to work on the Milly, Molly series of books.

The Milly, Molly books were written for children between the ages of four and eight; the books promote the acceptance of diversity and the learning of life skills and how to deal with day-to-day issues. Students develop understanding about honesty, respect for others, difference, tenacity, exercise, cooperation, respect for nature, bullying, stranger danger, forgiveness, trustworthiness, responsibility, loyalty, loss and grief. The books encourage students to look at values such as responsibility, and to think about their own responsibilities at home and at school.

‘Community circle’ time was also used as a vehicle for the values project. Teachers brought their class members together several times a day to meet in a community circle for sharing, discussions on learning, reflecting on the day and celebrating. This community circle practice was a first step in implementing the essential protective factors that foster resiliency: caring and sharing, participation and positive communication.

Even though this explicit teaching of values occurred in schools across the cluster, as the project unfolded some teachers began to look more closely at the congruence of what was being taught and the modelling of the school values by the school community. After each school worked independently at developing their own approaches, it became clear to the cluster coordinator that there was a need for a more consistent and coherent approach to values education across all the cluster schools. As the coordinator put it:

The one thing that has stuck in my mind as being the pivotal learning curve is that everybody needs to be aware of and appreciate personal values before we can instil this in our classroom. After much in-depth thinking, both with myself and other colleagues, I have come to the conclusion that in order for us to instil and respect any value type with children then we must in turn reflect upon and identify with our own values first. We cannot expect our children to live by a set of values and norms if we are unable to adhere to them ourselves … On reflecting on these few examples of our journey, it has become clear that teaching values cannot be done as a neat package of stand-alone lessons but [must be] a continuous program across all learning areas, which provides ongoing opportunities to express, discuss, represent and learn about the many values which are critical to enriching and improving the lives of every individual.

This reflection was reinforced by the UAN adviser for the cluster, who noted:

While the explicit teaching of values is important, as evidenced by the case studies emerging from the Values Education Good Practice Schools projects, it is my contention that it is even more important for teachers to be encouraged to reflect on their own values and how these inform their teaching, and the decisions they make on a daily basis that impact not only on their students’ learning outcomes, but on their lives. It is not enough for teachers to ‘teach’ values – they must be aware of their own values so that their teaching and the relationships they develop with students can benefit from this awareness. In the current context of the explicit teaching of values, teachers’ practice cannot remain unexamined. More must be done to encourage teachers to examine their practice, to ensure there is an alignment between rhetoric and the reality played out in the classroom.