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.


DUNMUNKLE CLUSTER
Victoria

The Ripple Effect of Values Education

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Participating schools:
- Murtoa College
- Rupanyup Primary School
- Minyip Primary School
- Our Lady Help of Christians School

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Key messages
1. Modelling is a critical aspect of values education. As the cluster coordinator asserts, ‘Students learn more from the person we are “being” and the behaviours we demonstrate than the content we are teaching.’
2. Integrated curriculum is an effective method by which to combine current curriculum content with explicit values education.
3. Secondary teachers should understand that values concepts need to be taught explicitly and consistently, and should not assume that their students have an understanding of these concepts.
4. It is important to achieve a critical mass of staff support when implementing values education to support the congruence and sustainability of the work over time.
5. Case writing is a useful tool for teachers to reflect on their practice and can be used as a professional learning tool both within the school and in wider learning communities.
6. The National Framework complements the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) in areas such as personal and interpersonal learning, communication and thinking. VELS supports opportunities for students, both to develop their understanding of values and to demonstrate them in action.
7. Values education is approached differently in primary and secondary settings. This difference relates to the amount of teaching time available for individual classes as well as to the stages of student development. Despite the differences, key issues affect both settings:
   - the capacity of the students
   - the teaching styles of the teachers
   - the time available for integrating values education into existing curriculum
   - the willingness of teachers, parents and students to work together and persevere.
Dunmunkle’s values education project, *The Ripple Effect of Values Education*, took each of the participating schools on a values journey. The project was designed to enable participating schools to work independently in some curriculum areas but together in others. The three small primary schools and one secondary school in rural Victoria have collaborated on a range of education issues for approximately 20 years. Collaborative curriculum projects include Literacy, Engaging Boys and the Thinking Curriculum.

The cluster structure provided professional support for four separate (but related) projects at the individual school level. The cluster objectives were to strategically plan for the explicit teaching of values and to bolster student leadership and peer support programs in the schools.

Rupanyup Primary School focused on the Habits of Mind program as a teaching and learning tool for values education. The cluster project was intended to enable the school to learn more about the Habits of Mind program, its link to values and means by which it could use them both implicitly and explicitly to motivate and engage students in their learning.

Our Lady Help of Christians School set out to make values education more ‘visible’ throughout the school. The school wanted the children to live and speak the values ‘talk’ and show that they understood and could interpret the values and make them meaningful in their lives as individuals. The school envisaged that students would be able to live and speak the core values; to show acceptance and tolerance for those who are ‘different’, while growing and maturing into responsible and thoughtful young Australians.

Murtoa College, Minyip Primary School and Rupanyup Primary School made values explicit in teaching and learning, and aimed at improving the schools’ cultures. The cluster reviewed the school policy and mission statements to explicitly incorporate values; undertook a whole school development of classroom culture; reviewed the student leadership structure and peer support program to enable students an opportunity to ‘live’ the school’s values; and developed of units of work explicitly linking values with the Victorian Essential Learning Standards.

School communities noted the need to work in partnership with the whole school community to gain support for values education approaches in rural and remote areas. At Minyip Primary School, the school initiated a Shot of Life project, based on Habits of Mind, and values language and ideas. Students were given a camera to take home for photos to be taken of people displaying any of the Habits of Mind or values principles. These photos were displayed in a hall in Minyip. It is a project that worked to integrate the school and the community.

Rupanyup Primary School initiated a Don’t Fence Me In project. This project involved five after-school painting sessions where parents and students constructed figures that are now decorating the school fence. Photos were taken and have been displayed in the school, linking what is shown with particular values. The school also introduced a Home/School Responsibility project as a means of linking home and school values. Parents were asked to complete a form that reflected on the values used by the student out of school time. These parent ‘reflections from home’ were published in the school newsletter, and then given back to the student to display at home.

A variety of strategies was used to enable the Dunmunkle Cluster schools to make values an explicit part of their day-to-day work. Each school undertook a review of school policy to make values more central to the school’s mission. While Minyip Primary School completed its review of school policy and managed to incorporate the Values for Australian Schooling into its charter, the other schools remained very much in the developmental stages of reviewing policy.

The Habits of Mind program was one of the major projects implemented by the cluster. Each school implemented variations of the program. The approach was modified to suit the school and the students. One finding is that while the Habits of Mind program was generally successful with Year 7 students, they found it difficult to be self-reflective. This had implications for both the work done in primary schools and the ways it can be followed up in the secondary context.

Another strategy had students keeping a journal in which they wrote their goals for the semester. These goals were transferred to individual report
cards, which meant that the goals had a life beyond the classroom. It was noted that the students from Our Lady Help of Christians School were involved very successfully in a range of reflective processes. The cluster case study concluded that the faith-based ethos of the school contributed to the success of the approach to reflection taken by students and teachers.

The cluster also had a strong focus on fostering student leadership through values education. The leadership activity was launched when a consultant worked with student leaders in all four schools to highlight the importance of leadership roles. Each school used its student leaders to assist with the implementation of values education through such programs as Peer Mediation and Student Councils and by involving students in modelling and disseminating information and experiences about how a school can ‘live’ its values.

Schools in this cluster reported a large amount of values education activity. The UAN report observed that the wider community, parents and casual relief teachers commented positively on the observed changed behaviour of students in both classrooms and in the schoolyard.

The cluster coordinator gathered key outcomes and learning from the projects delivered across schools. These include:

- Students learn more from the person we are ‘being’ and the behaviours we demonstrate than the content we are teaching. Values must be modelled. Students are astute and quickly recognise teachers who do not ‘walk the talk’.
- Some students do not have other strong, positive role models in their lives. Their teachers, rightly or wrongly, sometimes fill this void.
- Schools need to provide links between values and the real world – they do not exist in a vacuum and students need to be immersed in opportunities to think, act and reflect.
- Introducing values education concepts through an integrated curriculum approach is an effective method by which to combine curriculum content with explicit values education teaching.
- A team approach is a powerful tool, both when developing values-rich units of work and when implementing them in the classroom.
- Treat school-based values education as an ongoing not a one-off program. ‘Don’t rest on your laurels.’ You may introduce an initiative with support of the community, but it won’t be long before the cohort changes (staff, students and parents) so you must be prepared to reflect and keep working at it.
- It’s important to involve the entire community as much as possible, especially in the initial stages of your project. The cluster found that by giving everyone a chance to contribute at the beginning, such as via surveys, there was an increased take-up of the project purposes.

The cluster coordinator’s reflection on the overall conduct of the project highlighted the fact that schools and teachers can operate at very different levels of engagement with values education:

In general, the project has seen the further development of values education in all schools in the cluster, though perhaps not to the same extent in all contexts. There has continued to be a focus on the explicit teaching of values, as well as the continuation of embedding values principles in all area of the curriculum. This has resulted in the development and implementation of creative and innovative programs that have added to the overall resources and ideas available to all schools in the cluster. While some teachers indicated initial reluctance to be involved in the work of values education, this reluctance has largely dissipated. Teachers have been able to witness the growing confidence and understanding demonstrated by students. They have begun to see that values education has become part of the culture of the schools.