EDMUND RICE MINISTRIES CLUSTER
South Australia

Engaging Youth and Promoting Values: An Integrated Service-Learning Approach

Cluster coordinators: Vince Fleming and Lynne Moten, Rostrevor College

Participating schools:
- Rostrevor College
- Saint Paul’s College
- Christian Brothers’ College

UAN critical friend: Emeritus Professor Robert Crotty, University of South Australia, South Australia

Key messages
1. Service learning can be supported by integrated values-rich curriculum content across key learning areas.
2. The values identified in the National Framework can be effectively married with the Heart Values as set out in the Edmund Rice Education Australia Charter and with other values of the Catholic faith tradition.
3. While values are intrinsic in the Catholic ethos and more specifically in the religious education learning area, values education can also be successfully infused across the curriculum to provide another lens for students to explore values concepts and their own contemporary world.
4. When students, through a variety of values-driven teaching and learning activities, understand the experiences of others they can develop empathetic character.
5. Creative values-driven curriculum design can effectively engage middle years boys with learning that speaks to their immediate and parochial concerns, as well as with learning that draws them out into the wider world of national and global issues.
The broad intention of the *Engaging Youth and Promoting Values* project was to integrate into the mainstream curriculum, on a shared basis, the service-learning programs already running separately in the cluster’s three secondary Catholic boy’s schools. Service learning within the cluster was described by Lynne Moten, Service Learning Coordinator, Rostrevor College, as:

The boys (the schools involved are single sex) are encouraged to assist and stand in solidarity with the poor and marginalised in our world, and to be aware of and respond to social justice issues.

Service learning takes place in the three colleges as part of an outreach program of the Religious Education and Retreat programs within the schools. By Year 11 the students are required to complete 50 hours of service within a wide variety of organisations. Every second year, some staff and students travel to India to be directly involved in quite specific social work and extend the service-learning notions located in the school ethos.

One of the main purposes of the project was to foster a culture of innovation in values education across the cluster by bringing elements from the social justice ethos of the schools into the middle years studies of society and environment (SOSE), English and religious education curriculum.

According to the UAN adviser for this cluster:

The good practice achievement of this cluster is that the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools has been utilised in such a way as to link the service-learning framework and the curriculum.

The three schools focused on different social justice areas, and wrote explicit values-rich units in English, SOSE, and religious education. The topics chosen were child and slave labour, environment protection (particularly water management), and refugees. The units sought to develop students’ skills in researching and gathering information as well as empowering them to make informed decisions and take responsibility. To do this, teachers employed various teaching strategies and approaches. The cluster case study reported that the project provided ‘an excellent vehicle for the sharing of resources and expertise’ and ‘to enhance values education and integrate delivery and assessment across disciplines’.

The purpose of this work was to develop in the students an increasing awareness of social justice through focusing on the values of compassion, care, social inclusion, justice, charity and empathy, and to explore these outside the ‘pigeonhole’ of religious education and so ‘create more holistic experiences for students’.

The processes used in the project included mapping the values of the National Framework to the other values criteria of Catholic faith traditions, engaging staff in professional development in interdisciplinary teaching, and developing appropriate learning resources. At Rostrevor College, the integrated social and religious education subject was relatively new and teachers were grappling with fully integrating the subject areas. Values education approaches provided a new way for teachers to infuse values learning through contemporary issues across a range of learning areas other than religious education.

Arguably, faith-based schools maintain values approaches through particular religious teachings and belief systems and through traditions. The values education project offered these Catholic colleges the opportunity to examine values approaches through a different lens. As the UAN adviser put it:

While it has been assumed, since Edmund Rice schools are Catholic, that these values have been taught ‘anyway’ as part of religious education, this project has highlighted the National Framework and presented an opportunity to name these values in a different way. They align beautifully with the Catholic faith and, more specifically, with the ethos and Charter (Heart Values) of Edmund Rice schools.

The middle school staff from the cluster came together to plan, develop, document and provide resources for units of study that integrated service learning into English, SOSE and religious education. These teachers wrote the units and conducted training for staff at their own schools. One of the purposes of this was to enable all middle years teachers to come to be actively involved in the project.

An example of a unit of work that demonstrates the integration of values education into an interdisciplinary middle years curriculum is the unit on the novel *Parvana* by Deborah Ellis. This novel tells the story of a young girl in Afghanistan struggling during the years of oppression under Taliban rule. Teachers used the novel across the three learning areas of English, religious education and SOSE, and explored Australian, Afghan and
United Nations perspectives on approaches to women’s and refugees’ rights, equality, responsibility and empathy.

The rich values-based integrated unit of work brings together powerful curriculum design elements that make the content of the unit highly engaging for middle years students. Whereas an English approach may have helped students to understand issues and analyse plot and character in the book, the added dimensions of exploring the values within the story, the study of Islam, researching the Australian experience of refugees and the role of the United Nations enriches the unit with values perspectives set in local, national and global contexts.

The UAN adviser remarked further on the cluster curriculum development process:

The curriculum writing was not a necessary part of service learning. It was an add-on. However, it had some unexpected effects. In the first place, it brought the three schools involved in the cluster together. They had a joint focus and they had the purpose of sharing curriculum materials. What eventuated was a shared experience and the outcomes have become available for use across the cluster.

What had previously been confined to a specific aspect of the school experience, the service learning, and what to some extent had been seen as separate from the mainstream schooling, now became embedded in the main curriculum stream because of the shared curriculum writing ... The new structure was entirely new and moved in its own direction. It was not specifically service learning. It was now a recognisable form of values education.

Through pre- and post-unit surveys, the cluster reported students’ deeper thinking and critical reflection. Some teachers reported many of the participating students exhibited an increased empathy to disadvantaged groups and the environment. This empathy was fostered through a variety of pedagogical approaches that provided an opportunity for students to better appreciate the situations of others. These included the use of simulations, exploring contemporary dilemmas and provision of opportunities for social action campaigns.

The cluster case study also claims that some students have developed a greater sense of self. This manifested in ‘noticeable changes in attitudes, behaviours and actions’. During the delivery of the three units at the three schools, teachers reported that many of the students involved acknowledged verbally and in writing that they felt more aware of their own values and their place in society in relation to others locally and globally. As the UAN adviser for the cluster observed:

As with most ethical dilemmas, the students contemplated answers which may not have been immediately available ... In particular, the responses of students show clear examples of self-knowledge. The students have distinguished what intentions are present in a situation in which people have been exploited. They have reflected and rejected those intentions. They have come to a real self-knowledge and have proposed alternative solutions. This is a considerable outcome.