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.


GRIFFITH PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS CLUSTER
New South Wales

Values in Action

Cluster coordinator: David Fox, Griffith High School

Participating schools:
- Griffith High School
- Griffith East Public School
- Griffith Public School
- Griffith North Public School
- Hanwood Public School
- Kalinda School
- Wade High School

UAN critical friend: Dr Peter Grootenboer (to October 2007) and Dr Tracey Smith, Charles Sturt University, New South Wales

Key messages
1. Student leadership in the values domain is a powerful method for developing student responsibility, initiative and agency when it is student-led rather than teacher-driven.
2. Values education creates shared goals that can transform individual schools into collaborative networks where previously there has been minimal contact with geographically close schools. As the UAN advisers for the cluster commented, ‘Schools learnt from each other in ways that could not be designed before the project began.’
3. A collaborative values education approach can bring disparate communities together in community-building activities. In this context, values have been characterised as the ‘glue’ that binds communities in shared action.
4. Values clashes or conflicts provide a starting point for school community discussion about ‘whose values’ in consensus-building exercises.
5. Echoing the Unity in Diversity, Merrylands–Guildford, Airds–Bradbury and Melbourne Interfaith clusters, the Griffith cluster reports that values education can provide a common objective ground for discussions about intracultural and intercultural issues.
6. Explicit teaching and modelling of values in intercultural contexts can cut through perceptions of difference and highlight areas of common understanding.
Griffith cluster’s *Values in Action* project made values education more explicit by bringing the values in the *National Framework* into the curriculum in a planned way. Project intentions included teaching and modelling values, using a common and shared language within and between participating schools, being consistent in staff approaches to values education and involving the whole community in the values education process.

Significant changes in the ethnic composition of the Griffith community have occurred over the last decade. These changes are reflected in the demographics of the school population. The community currently comprises members of more than 40 cultural groups, making it a unique centre within rural New South Wales. Of these, the most significant in number would be the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Indian, Turkish, Pacific communities, Italian, Filipino and African cultures. There is also a growing number of Afghani families with a refugee background. In addition, there is a broad socioeconomic range represented within Griffith schools. While these factors enrich the schools’ cultures, they also pose a range of challenges for schools, in particular the challenge of breaking down the cultural barriers that exist in the community and the schools.

Project activity highlighted and clarified sets of values which reflected the intention and spirit of the *National Framework* and the Values in NSW Public Schools policy by embedding values into the systems and practices of schools. The UAN adviser working with this cluster noted:

One of the significant markers in the Griffith project was the degree of community building in terms of the way in which individual schools transformed into a collaborative network ... In addition, a shared goal of making values more explicit in schools was identified. This shared goal, once identified, seemed to provide the ‘glue’ that held the cluster together.

This notion of values education providing the ‘glue’ to bring people together around common understandings across and within school communities resonates with a number of other clusters in Stage 2 of the VEGPSP. The Griffith project sought to establish a cluster framework for these values to be shared and practised in real terms within schools and in the wider Griffith community. Student action groups enabled the schools to lead and participate in a series of community events to highlight the schools’ values and demonstrate commitment to them. These forums were designed to make a significant contribution to effecting cultural change in the Griffith community. This implementation model allowed each school the opportunity to tailor activities to suit local community needs. Although making values more explicit was a goal for all schools, the processes for achieving this goal were experienced in multiple ways.

The project involved a range of separate school-level values projects all designed to address the cultural barriers in the Griffith schools and the broader Griffith community.

As a cluster, the schools organised themselves to meet this challenge by having Griffith High School act as a coordinator of the project that conducted a number of different school-level projects all concerned to address the cultural issues facing the community. The focal points of the school-level projects are outlined in Table 1 on page 59.

Griffith High School used planning and action teams to implement the project. A community advisory group, comprising representatives from many of the different cultural groups in the community, reviewed the school’s values platform.

The school also established three staff teams, responsible for:

- designing and delivering the specific values lessons in the middle school
- undertaking the review of core values platforms and identifying how they might be made more prominent
- exploring ways by which the school could participate in developing community harmony.

A Year 7 student leadership team demonstrated the values within their classrooms and were values spokespersons for their respective classes. They also acted as a focus group for teachers monitoring the progress of values education within their year group. This focus on student responsibility gave the project momentum and sustainability.

The school also developed and explicitly taught the nature and spirit of the NSW values to all Year 7 students through a specially developed wellbeing
program. Each Year 7 class has a one-hour period once per fortnight taught by the year advisor in which the values are examined. Values charts are on display in each Year 7 classroom.

Values education was also made an explicit part of the pastoral care program. Pastoral care involves looking after the general wellbeing of the class and dealing with day-to-day issues, mostly during roll call time. One teacher described the approach in the following terms:

During roll call each day, I encourage the students to engage in a values discussion. I lead the discussion and initially we talked about the difference between passive and active participation. Most students saw participation as ‘listening’ and ‘speaking’ during group discussions. Getting all students to participate in a discussion by both speaking and listening was a hard task, but we did achieve quite a good rate of success. Some interesting topics for our discussions about values this year have included responsibility, integrity, caring and respect.

A number of other pragmatic efforts were pursued in an effort to implement the project:

- Students were actively encouraged to demonstrate and live the values in their school and personal lives. Accordingly, they participated in community events such as Anzac Day, the Red Shield Appeal, Clean Up Australia and Riding for the Disabled.
- Faculty head teachers encouraged their staff to teach values in ‘teachable moments’, that is, when they arose in classrooms during scheduled classwork.
- Assembly addresses became a crucial vehicle to communicate the values message. Every assembly included some reference to a key value, which might be reflected in concurrent activities within the school or the community.
- The deputy principal used a ‘talking values’ approach, taking every opportunity to talk values, for example, with the executive when discussing planning, with students when visiting their classes, and with students and parents when dealing with discipline or welfare issues.
- Values forums were used with students in Years 8–9.

Griffith High School reported significant improvements in the culture of classroom learning environments and commented:
Table 1: Focal points of schools’ values education projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Focus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Griffith Public School</td>
<td>Explicit teaching of values in Stage 3 classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Griffith High School</td>
<td>Explicit teaching of values in middle school classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kalinda School</td>
<td>Explicit teaching of values related to the school rules</td>
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<tr>
<td>Griffith East Public School</td>
<td>Staff development in values education and explicit teaching of values across the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Griffith North Public School</td>
<td>Social Skills Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wade High School</td>
<td>Values education and student leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hanwood Public School</td>
<td>Values education and student leadership</td>
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