THE LANYON CLUSTER OF SCHOOLS
Australian Capital Territory

A Multiliteracies Approach to Values Education

Cluster coordinator: Rita Van Haren, Lanyon High School

Participating schools:
- Lanyon High School
- Birrigai Outdoor Education Centre
- Bonython Primary School
- Charles Condor Primary School
- Gordon Primary School
- Tharwa Primary School

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Key messages
1. When schools focus consistently on values in the school, and particularly through curriculum, parents and the broader community can work in partnership to create congruence between the values espoused at home and those espoused at school.
2. Values education is not merely a program that can be implemented in classrooms; it is a process that involves teachers in ongoing professional learning and action research in a ‘plan, do, study, act’ model that actively nurtures ‘the teacher as researcher’ and ultimately transforms practice.
3. With sustained implementation over time, values education approaches lead to improved student social skills and to safe and harmonious classrooms and playgrounds.
4. With a metalanguage to discuss values, and more importantly to understand and include them in their daily lives, students develop their communicative competence and improve their literacy performance.
5. Students participating in values approaches are more engaged in learning and show improved education outcomes when learning is linked to their lived experiences.
Lanyon’s project, *A Multiliteracies Approach to Values Education*, sought to improve student learning outcomes related to the Values for Australian Schooling by ensuring learner belonging and learner transformation through the teaching and learning process. The cluster wanted teachers to collect evidence of learner transformation in relation to the Values for Australian Schooling. It also wanted to make use of digital technologies, using multimodal forms of communication including linguistic, visual, audio and spatial, to create learning environments relevant to the changing world of the twenty-first century.

The project also acknowledged the need for whole school communities to be engaged with the work. Each cluster school held community forums. Designed by the students, these forums built upon the values that the students focused on in their learning. They enabled students to demonstrate their learning and their understanding of values education, build community partnerships and enhance community perceptions of their local school and of public education.

The project methodology was based on an action research model in which teachers worked in small teams to plan, implement and evaluate units of work, known as learning elements, based on values education. The approach is based on the values-laden Learning by Design framework, a values-based pedagogical framework that has teachers working in collaborative teams, as teacher scholars, to make their pedagogy explicit through a planning and documentation process.

Learning by Design focuses on pedagogy as a way of improving student learning outcomes. The strategy supports teachers to develop a deeper understanding of values education. The reflection and discussion inherent in the approach ensures that the resources developed by teachers are explicit, shareable, transparent, re-usable and professionally documented.

At the outset, 22 teachers planned and documented learning elements based on the Learning by Design framework, and shared their work with other teacher scholars through the planning phase of the action research cycle. The implementation of the learning elements was done as the first action step and was followed by monitoring and evaluation phases of the action research cycle.

Teachers undertook case writing and individual case studies to establish the context and provide an account of the learning problem for their individual cases. They then gathered data and described what happened in the teaching and what appeared to be the student learning. These accounts became the substance of teacher meetings intended to gradually improve the learning elements being developed. It was hoped that by documenting their planning in this way teachers would describe the learning from the teacher’s perspective and from the learner’s perspective. In doing so, students should then be informed about their learning and have input into the process. As the cluster UAN adviser observed:

> The rigorous documentation deriving from using Learning by Design serves toward sustainability – something desirable for the Lanyon cluster, having had a high staff turnover and a need to assist new teachers take on a values focus in their teaching.

Whatever frameworks are chosen, collaboration and a whole school approach is key in creating a positive school approach to values education. All teachers interviewed expressed appreciation of the shared planning with other teachers, reducing fears and increasing enthusiasm and inspiration in the process. As such, collaborative planning may be seen as parallel to a constructivist classroom, and therefore as having similar benefits as normally associated with guided constructivism, eg making values education initiatives ‘one’s own’ rather than something that ‘one has to do’ and as directed by a top-down model of leadership.

With a metalanguage to discuss values, students developed their communicative competence. They were able to discuss their feelings openly and solve disputes and issues of bullying, feeling isolated and making friends. It enabled them to engage in discussions where they could explore and challenge their own values and the values of others. For example, it deepened their understanding of responsibility so they could take actions to care for the environment; of fairness so they could explore and act on ways of being a fair player, a fair person and a fair member of society; of freedom so they could empathise with people who do not have freedom; of their social and environmental responsibilities as road users; and of integrity so they could critically reflect on the role of the media in their lives.

Like many other clusters, one of the important features of this cluster project was the focus on...
developing a common values language for students to discuss, reflect upon and enact. The UAN adviser recognised the importance and vitality of this, and said that a common language:

has had exponential effects that go beyond communicative competence. Having a shared language seems to be at the centre of developing deeper understandings of values, as it allows students to engage in discussions, clarify their thinking and develop socially constructed connections to values. Because language is so central to social interaction and communication – and perhaps even to the very process of thinking itself (Vygotsky 1985) – having a metalanguage provides a pivotal reference point from which students can explore, consolidate and build values-related knowledge, whether that be in formal learning situations or out of their own accord.

This observation is echoed by a Year 1 student’s reflections on the learning element What’s Up Goldilocks:

The best part was when we were learning about what the values mean. I didn’t get it, well not all of it, and then [our teacher] showed us. It was funny. She, like when some people didn’t know what honesty was, she showed us. She threw a rubber across the room and people said don’t ‘cause it’s not the right thing to do and she lied and said she didn’t do it. Well that’s not honest, then she did it again but this time she said she did and said sorry. That’s honest. I value honesty. We did lots of those and it made it easy to get what everything means. I also like having our values photos in the classroom everyone can see them and it reminds us what to do.

The UAN adviser further builds on this common values language motif and explores the connection between values fostering emotional literacy, and in turn empathy and prosocial behaviour. Values from the National Framework are now articulated in the cluster mission statement and in the documentation of the schools’ student management procedures and philosophy.

The Lanyon cluster has been working on this project for a number of years, and the cluster is well positioned to make comments based on a more substantial set of experiences over time. The cluster coordinator commented that some outcomes of the project included:

- Students developed communicative competence in values.
- Students’ literacy improved.
- Students became more engaged in their learning through links to their life worlds.
- Students developed their social skills, and classrooms and playgrounds became more harmonious in safer environments.
- Values were embedded in the whole curriculum.
- Teachers led other teachers in values education and in implementing system priorities such as the ACT Curriculum Framework.
- The community responded positively to the focus on values education.

The cluster began work with the Learning by Design framework in 2004. Since 2005 the effects of their interventions can be tracked by the decreasing number of students in the bottom 20 per cent of the Australian Capital Territory Assessment Program and the increasing number of students in the middle 60 per cent and upper 20 per cent. The trend has been maintained in 2006 and 2007 as more teachers have implemented Learning by Design and focused on values education. Similar improvement data was presented across the national testing cohorts of Years 7 and 9.

One of the key learnings from this cluster is provided by the UAN report and echoed in other cluster reports:

It should be highlighted that integrating values education across the curriculum produces more than associations and synthesis in the students’ learning: it seems to have an ability to become a ‘social glue’ – a communal convergence point around which quality teaching and human relationships can exist more easily.