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.


OXENFORD CLUSTER
Queensland

Philosophy in the Classroom and Beyond

Cluster coordinator: Val Faulks, Oxenford State School

Participating schools:
- Oxenford State School
- Gaven State School
- Arundel State School
- Biggera Waters State School
- Upper Coomera State College (Prep – Year 12)

UAN critical friend: Dr Christine Tom, Bond University, Queensland

Key messages
1. Philosophy in the classroom can be used to develop and implement a learning framework based on ethical reasoning that is inherently rich in values education concepts.
2. Inquiry-based learning is enriched when teachers systematically develop students’ deep thinking and analytical questioning skills.
3. Values education through philosophy in the classroom teaches attentive listening and helps students understand and accept different points of view and perspectives. The values inherent to the pedagogy reinforce and foster key values in the National Framework.
4. Values dispositions must be actively modelled by teachers in their teaching practices.
5. Values dispositions must be explicitly taught through meaningful dilemmas and scenarios to ensure that students have a common understanding of the dispositions and are able to see and understand what they look like so they can apply them in their lives.
6. While philosophy in the classroom develops students’ understanding of the big questions, students are at different levels and sustained teaching is required to move understanding into action.
Oxenford’s Philosophy in the Classroom and Beyond was a predominantly primary school based project. A number of the Oxenford cluster schools were participants in Stage 1 of the VEGPSP. The cluster sought to implement philosophy in the classroom to deepen students’ understanding of the Values for Australian Schooling as described in the National Framework.

At inception, the project sought to set up a Gold Coast North Philosophy in the Classroom cluster with shared professional learning and a network of support and exchange of ideas. As the project unfolded, however, activity was less cluster-based and more targeted to specific school contexts.

All schools in this cluster wished to use philosophy in the classroom as the key pedagogy for embedding values into an integrated curriculum. This reflected both the initial work undertaken in this area in Stage 1, as well as a long-term engagement with this approach to pedagogy and curriculum.

While philosophy in the classroom was a prime focus in Stage 1, each of the schools in this Stage 2 cluster undertook their own localised approaches to values education which reflected a range of issues, including a deeper understanding of the connection between values education and philosophy in the classroom, changing school demographics, explicitly embedding the values across the curriculum and actively teaching children prosocial values dispositions. The approach also fostered students’ learning skills. As one school coordinator expressed it:

Through the implementation of philosophy in the classroom we aim to improve reasoning abilities of students, improve the quality of student thinking about important matters and examine ethical issues and having students become more thoughtful and responsible with an understanding of behaviours the Australian society considers worthwhile. Philosophy in the classroom is a powerful tool through which students can engage with and reflect on the [values identified in the National Framework].

Gaven State School staff saw the connection between thought or notion and action. They wanted to teach the meaning of individual values so that students could move from a theoretical understanding of a value to values lived in action. This meant making the abstract concrete and attaching it to meaningful experiences in students’ lives. As one teacher put it:

We are hoping that once we teach the values of respect, understanding and tolerance, and show the students through role-play and literature, they will be able to act in a way that demonstrates the values we are reinforcing. If we teach that respect involves using manners, then we are hoping to see the students using their manners in reflection of what they have learnt about being respectful.

Biggera Waters State School recognised the importance of a strong leadership group to oversee and monitor their values education approaches. The school formed a Values Education Committee and developed an action plan, which included a timetable for professional development and training, and a description of project activities for students, staff and the community.

The Biggera Waters State School committee also created a learning network that involved linking with a teacher at Upper Coomera State College, who acted as a mentor and critical friend, shared expertise in the form of good practices and resources, and established an internal support mechanism in the form of an internal weekly emailing and discussion list called Philosophy Corner.

At Oxenford State School, the project goal in Stage 2 was to continue the school’s implementation of philosophy in the classroom. In Stage 1, the focus was looking at values as behaviours and how the values identified in the National Framework were exhibited as behaviours during a community of inquiry. In Stage 2, the focus moved to the whole school environment using the learnings from the community of inquiry to discuss how the values can be seen and explicitly nurtured. A greater emphasis on parent participation was another feature of Stage 2, as was a series of activities directly involving explicit teaching of values through structured multidisciplinary approaches.

Some of the projects undertaken across the school at Oxenford are described in Table 2.

The Oxenford UAN adviser reported a range of positive outcomes from the Oxenford cluster:

Students have become more reflective thinkers in values education discussions, and are able to:

  - use reasoning to base ideas and opinions
  - reflect on their behaviour
  - develop and ask better questions
participate with more confidence in philosophical discussions
better problem solve
verbalise thoughts and opinions
empathise more with others
listen effectively to their peers and teachers.

Philosophy in the classroom also develops a sense of peer support and reinforces positive interactions between students and the community.

Teachers in the cluster report that they are now using a philosophical community of inquiry approach to teaching values and have expanded their pedagogy to include values education in other areas of the curriculum.

They also report that the values project has enabled colleagues to gain a deeper understanding of students’ opinions and beliefs, and that this has given them the opportunity to reflect more effectively on their classroom and teaching practices.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year level</th>
<th>Values focus</th>
<th>Year-level project activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years 1 and 2</td>
<td>Doing your best</td>
<td>Doing the best for the environment by planting a garden in front of the classroom, caring for it and keeping it litter-free. Created a tile mosaic which says ‘Doing your best’.</td>
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<td>Years 1 and 2</td>
<td>Fair go</td>
<td>Created a banner depicting ideas on ‘fair go’ developed in class discussions. Years 1 and 2 students were paired to design a square of fabric for the school banner, which includes photographs, drawings and words that depicted ‘fair go’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years 1, 2 and 3</td>
<td>Care and compassion</td>
<td>Each student made a basic hand-stitched teddy bear and decorated these bears with messages about caring for others and showing compassion.</td>
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<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Produced a series of short plays on the theme of ‘integrity’.</td>
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<td>Years 3 and 4</td>
<td>Honesty and trustworthiness</td>
<td>Made a hessian craft display – students at the centre are surrounded by speech bubbles with statements that reflect the values of honesty and trustworthiness in their lives.</td>
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<td>Years 4 and 5</td>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Wrote and produced a dramatisation with a message about ‘respect’.</td>
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<td>Year 6</td>
<td>Understanding, tolerance and inclusion</td>
<td>Buddying with Years 1 and 2 to teach them to dance and then presenting to the dance to parents on Open Day.</td>
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<td>Years 6 and 7</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Developed a ‘responsibility’ kit for each student consisting of photos and artefacts that symbolise the value. Students wrote their own plays with the theme of ‘responsibility’. Other students worked in pairs to create a visual display of the values.</td>
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<td>Years 5 and 7</td>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>After class discussions on the concept, the group created plaques with messages of ‘freedom’ to place in a newly constructed Anzac garden.</td>
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