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.


SEA AND VALES CLUSTER
South Australia

Making a Difference: Living Our Values in Local, National and Global Contexts

Cluster coordinator: Marion MacKenzie, Seaford 6–12 School

Participating schools:
- Seaford 6–12 School
- Seaford Rise Primary School
- All Saints Catholic Primary School
- Moana Primary School
- Noarlunga Primary School

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

Key messages
1. Capacity matrices can be incorporated in teaching and learning units to enable teachers and students to add a values dimension to all key learning areas. This values dimension in the secondary school setting is manifested in students taking a proactive responsibility for their learning and actions.
2. Communities of practice emerge when teacher professional learning is both a process and a practice deeply embedded in the school ethos.
3. Distributed leadership in values education drives transformational whole school change.
4. Disengaged secondary-aged students respond to values education approaches when they are connected to real issues in the students’ lives. As the coordinator said, learning for this age group needs to ‘engage or enrage’.
5. Students in a values-rich environment take more responsibility for their own and others’ learning and behaviour. Teachers are therefore more able to target assistance to specific needs groups in more focused classroom environments.
The aim of the Sea and Vales project, Making a Difference, was to skill teachers through professional development in the delivery of values education and to provide opportunity for staff to work in teams to develop and to begin implementing civic and environmental projects through the curriculum and through co-curricular activities.

There were two levels to this project: one at a cluster level, which served as a think tank and mutual support structure; and another at the individual school level, where schools developed and implemented particular localised interpretations of the project. Cluster representatives met regularly to share and support one another with any issues the cluster was facing.

A major focus of the cluster’s work was professional development. Initially, this took the form of all schools participating in a cluster closure day. One hundred and seventy staff attended this session, and heard Associate Professor Terry Lovat deliver the keynote address. Ms Joy De Leo from the Asia Pacific Network for International Education and Values Education facilitated and unpacked how to incorporate values education into teaching and learning. In the afternoon each school worked in teams to develop learning units across all learning areas and action plans to implement values education.

Across the cluster, 54 staff representatives from each school and a neighbouring school attended a two-day session with Margaret Bishop on Constructive Pedagogies. This professional development was used to further skill staff in the creation of rich learning tasks that have a community or environmental focus.

Individual schools embarked on localised interpretations of the project. At Seaford 6–12 for instance, units of work including a developmental values matrix were designed in all subject areas.

The Seaford 6–12 staff also developed a consistent set of behavioural expectations for collegial support based on the school values. The Student Representative Council worked with a cartoonist to interpret the school values on posters to be displayed around the school. A community-based project involving the local council and one of the cluster primary schools was undertaken. A school vision statement was developed that involved whole community consultation.

Evidence of values can be seen across all sites in banners, posters, newsletters and elsewhere. Action plans were developed for each class, implementing a rich learning task with a values basis themed with ‘respect’. Rubrics for students assessing development in learning focused on ‘responsibility’ for self were developed. Parent forums entitled Living our Values depicting and demonstrating the school values were held with students. The cluster coordinator enthused about the impact of using visuals to reinforce the values work in the cluster:

The visuals … have been described as the ‘easy stuff’ – erecting the signs, the posters in classrooms, the postcards home, writing Values into Site Learning Plans and Student Behaviour Management Policies, Values Awards at assemblies and so on. What they have provided in our schools is, by working through explicit activities, a common understanding and language of our individual school’s values. They are at every turn and in all sorts of forms to refer to and to be reminded of. Staff, students and parents use the language of values to communicate with one another, improving the quality of dialogue and the building of more positive relationships at all levels.

Doing just this can have a huge impact on enhancing cohesion within a school and across the cluster as students, families and community partners transition from one site to another.

Cluster staff explicitly taught the value of respect by focusing on self-respect through health, including establishing Healthy Eating Guidelines and being involved with the school vegetable patch. It was also achieved through the Environmental Waterwatch Project, undertaken with three local schools and the local council.

Eighteen care groups in the middle school and two at Year 10 (approximately 500 students) implemented a lifelong learning book Tomorrow’s Citizens Today. The book was adapted from Dr Jennie Bickmore-Brand’s work. Students selected community service activities from the book that they could do at school, home or in the community.

At Moana Primary School, staff concentrated upon a more pragmatic approach using multiple strategies to involve the students in a variety of school-based and community activities. Some of these included:
• A long-term joint community spaces project was designed between Moana Primary School, the Seaford–Moana Neighbourhood Centre, and the City of Onkaparinga, which would enable the building of relationships between administration, staff, students and families at school; the management, staff and clients of the Neighbourhood Centre; Families in our Community; and the City of Onkaparinga. The dream was to design and actualise a shared community space that would develop from joint consultations with all parties involved.

• A peer group project involved interaction between buddy classes and residents of a local retirement village, specifically through hosting a concert and morning tea at a cluster school.

• Aboriginal Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC Week, and other culturally important occasions were celebrated.

• Respect and responsibility were specifically taught. The social education teacher played a pivotal role in ensuring the consistent delivery of programs, and the consistent use of common language.

All Saints Catholic Primary School nominated a values coordinator to guide the staff through the background of the project, who it involved, the cluster project itself, professional development opportunities and, most importantly, discerning what values education means for a Catholic school. Activities included:

• focusing the school on respect – ‘for ourselves, others and the environment’
• year-level Learning Communities met regularly to discuss their work in relation to class mission statements and to work on their projects.

The Seaford 6–12 School provided a useful model for how student agency can be improved by adding a values spotlight to existing curriculum. Seaford 6–12 used capacity matrices as a mechanism for mapping curriculum outcomes in ways that are useful, clear and values-rich for students. Capacity matrices enable students to track the progress of their learning in terms of knowledge, skills and values. The cluster coordinator described this as self-directed learning. It is an effective method of teaching students how to reflect on what they learn and link it to active citizenship.

The Seaford 6–12 School reported various patterns of improvement since it became a values school. Teachers commented that they perceived noticeable changes at the school since the values education had become a whole school approach:

I’ve noticed the school change in many ways, the most important for me is that I am now dealing with students in a proactive way. I feel that students are beginning to take responsibility for their action and behaviours. In the past there were always issues with students that were reactive; I seemed to always be putting out spot fires with behavioural issues. There’s now more time to spend with those who really need help in the class.

The UAN friend for this cluster observed the linkages between values education and good practice in teaching and learning, in that values education:

• provides some form of vital leadership for the program
• promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character
• promotes core values as the basis of all aspects of school life
• embeds these core values in a value system, a structure that itself can take many forms
• has staff commitment to model and teach values within this structure
• has active parent and community participation in the values program, with their participation being drawn into the structure
• provides opportunities for students to practise values in and beyond the school and therefore beyond the boundaries of the structure.