SUSTAINABLE VALUES TOWNSVILLE CLUSTER
Queensland

Values in a Sustainable World

Cluster coordinators: Anthony Ryan and Patricia Duffy, Townsville Central State School

Participating schools:
- Townsville Central State School
- Garbutt State School
- Magnetic Island State School
- Oonoonba State School
- Railway Estate State School
- Rasmussen State School
- Townsville State High School
- Townsville West State School
- Thuringowa State High School

UAN critical friend: Dr Angela Hill, James Cook University, Queensland

Key messages
1. The approach adopted by the cluster builds on the ‘key elements and approaches that inform good practice’ outlined in the National Framework, and notes that good practice incorporates the key elements suggested as part of this framework (pp 6–7 of the National Framework).
2. Teacher development is vital to the successful implementation of values initiatives. A useful scaffolding model to direct this teacher development includes the following elements:
   - focusing on a curriculum vision
   - enacting powerful, active pedagogies
   - designing rich assessment tasks that promote student reflection as well as technical competence
   - the development of a strong conceptual base to contextualise values education work.
3. Assessing values education is problematic when approached from a traditional core curriculum key learning area perspective. However, switching the focus to an assessment of learning using assessment rubrics that add a values dimension to the aspects of learning based on key learning areas creates deeper assessment conversations.
The Values in a Sustainable World project aimed to expand on the successful implementation of the Stage 1 project by deeply embedding the values from the National Framework into the curriculum. Units of work on sustainability were also developed within this project. The Sustainable Values Townsville Cluster moved beyond its concentration on peer support during Stage 1 to more comprehensive values education approaches across all aspects of school life.

The approaches relied on teacher development in the following areas:
- focusing on a curriculum vision
- enacting student-centred, active pedagogies
- designing rich assessment tasks that promoted student reflection as well as technical competence
- developing a strong conceptual base to contextualise ‘values education’ work.

The project’s focus was on developing curriculum-based models founded on UNESCO’s interlocking model of sustainability to provide a framework for teachers to develop units that allowed students to take responsibility for future sustainability in local, national and global contexts.

Initially, the schools investigated how a common curriculum framework could be used as a vehicle for values education. The main objective was to embed the notion of sustainability into day-to-day activities of the schools through a values education approach. Sustainability was considered to be a good model for more than just the environment. The schools were not solely concerned with environmental sustainability but also addressed other concepts such as ecological, social and other notions of sustainability. With this agreement, the schools then proceeded with individual projects.

One school started by working the UNESCO sustainability model and the National Framework into their planning pro forma. However, this was not a simple process and involved a cultural shift and change of direction for many teachers. Teachers were concerned that a concentration on sustainability would distract from teaching the core curriculum.

In one school, a local wetlands unit was developed using a common curriculum framework that focused on sustainability. A number of people and agencies were involved in the project, such as the Queensland Wetlands Program, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, James Cook University and Townsville City Council. By involving these local agencies, the school engaged the wider community and students began to understand the relationship between the government departments and local authorities responsible for the health of the wetlands. Importantly, students were involved in a range of out-of-school activities as the unit unfolded, such as canoeing and water testing.

A key issue the teachers faced in creating the units was ensuring that they were engaging students in more than just activities. They wanted the units to not just provide information, but to challenge students’ higher order thinking, introduce them to critical thinking and encourage them to ask questions for themselves.

While individual schools in the cluster focused on their own projects, schools within the cluster and outside of the formal cluster worked on shared projects as well. The COME HOME – Breathing House Exhibition involved three diverse schools, all within ten kilometres of each other: Townsville Central State School (an inner city school with students from diverse cultural backgrounds), Garbutt State School (an inner city school with a large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students), and Stuart State School (a small rural school).

This whole school, community arts based project aimed to develop a sense of self and connectedness for the students that would assist them in managing their lives positively and safely while being involved in and supported by their community.

Most importantly the COME HOME – Breathing House Exhibition was about children connecting to their elders in a meaningful way. Over eight weeks, a team of eight artists from the local arts community and interstate worked with the children and local and interstate artists to transform a mid-suburban house into a community wonderland representing the relations of young people to special elders in their lives. Ceramics, poster painting, collages, drawings, sculptures and snippets of interviews with students formed an interactive sound installation which was displayed in a local house. The house was open to the whole community and over five thousand people...
attended this living display of artefacts that connected students to special elders in their lives.

A key learning from the Stage 2 project was the importance of a whole school approach, and how this can mean an array of smaller projects springing from teachers looking at their curriculum content, practice and making changes to what they teach and how they teach it. The project asked teachers to educate the whole child with the attendant values dispositions and skills to allow them to participate as effective local, national and global citizens. The four sustainability curriculum organisers of environmental, ecological, economic and social sustainability allowed teachers to focus clearly on this goal.

At Rasmussen Primary School, teachers said that the project helped them make their teaching:

Real-world, real-life and they now embed values into the curriculum, not as optional add-ons.

Two project teachers from another school teaching a unit that focused on human rights had their classes approach businesses about funding to make a school pack to send to other countries. According to one of the teachers:

The students have shown immense interest in the topic, independently creating logos and developing business cards.

The teacher was so overwhelmed by their responsiveness that she began to question the techniques that should be employed to monitor such growth in students. She also began to question her more formal classroom teaching as a result of seeing the way the students engaged with business people.

Another teacher pointed to the importance of relationship building in successful teaching:

I implemented the unit last year, but I’ve noticed that the students in my class this year have not embraced the topic as much. This has led to discussions among school staff regarding what is different this year, whether the students are just interested in showing their values in different ways, are they perhaps more interested in the environment than care and compassion towards people? On reflection, I feel that I have not actually developed the depth of relationship with those children as yet.

Another insight from Rasmussen Primary School was that involvement in the project has produced a new school ethos:

Staff are outlining that this is a very exciting time for the school as they are beginning to live the vision that was discussed years earlier. It is not just work on a paper, but a whole shift in the school community towards a more peaceful ethos.

Several cluster schools pointed to the way embedding the values into the curriculum has affected students:

The project led to an audit of the curriculum framework with a view to embedding the values. Students have become involved in international projects in embedding the curriculum units, and were so engaged in their unit ‘Speak out – Make a difference’ that they have become proactive in changing some school organisation. Staff noted observable changes such as a calmer school with more focused learners.

At one of the high schools, however:

The culture of separateness has also presented an issue within the project. People who are in English and SOSE work well together already, but there is a slight reluctance or lack of ability to see the way to come together as a group of four. Basically, this is unfamiliar ground for all involved but the teachers are very willing to engage in and work through it. The enthusiasm of staff has enabled the project to maintain momentum. Also at the same school where the project focused on water management staff have noticed a behavioural change in the water use practices of the students and the next step is to consider transference to other classes, particularly in the lower levels.