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.*


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**TOOWOOMBA NORTH CLUSTER**  
Queensland

**Values Alignment Project**

**Cluster coordinators:** Dan Feehely (until December 2007) and Debbie McKay, Toowoomba State High School – Wilsonton Campus

**Participating schools:**
- Toowoomba State High School – Wilsonton Campus
- Harlaxton State School
- Wilsonton State School

**UAN critical friend:** Dr Marian Lewis, University of Southern Queensland, Queensland

**Key messages**

1. When values approaches drive pedagogy, teachers concentrate in the first instance on establishing positive and respectful relationships with their students. This transforms the teacher and the learner and contributes to more confident, trusting and caring relationships.

2. Successful values education approaches produce closer teacher–student relationships and involve confronting challenges for teachers, as curriculum content is not the sole focus of attention in the development of the whole child.

3. Values education acts as a change agent for teachers who feel disengaged as they can experience a renewed appreciation of the power of positive relationships. As one teacher reflected, ‘Values education has resurrected my belief in why I am a teacher, the importance of being a teacher and the importance of being a good teacher.’

4. The values and approaches to values education promoted in the *National Framework* can be integrated successfully into existing school programs, such as Innovative Designs for Enhancing Improvement in Schools. Values education is not an additional item on the curriculum agenda.

5. Parent and school partnerships are essential in values education. However, teachers need to drive change at a personal, classroom and whole school level to embed and sustain the changes.
In 2003 the three schools in the Toowoomba North Cluster commenced a two-year formal engagement with IDEAS (Innovative Designs for Enhancing Improvement in Schools) with its process of whole school revitalisation. Through IDEAS, each of the three schools developed a pedagogical framework consisting of a shared vision (underpinned by explicit values) and a school-wide pedagogy. The cluster saw its Stage 2 Values Alignment Project as a logical continuation of their IDEAS work, as it provided a way of building on what had already been achieved, in particular extending the work on values.

The cluster’s vision was to inspire IDEAS schools to engage in journeys of self-discovery which lead to sustainable excellence in teaching and learning. IDEAS was used by schools as a framework for exploring the Queensland State Education – 2010 agenda and school planning and accountability requirements. Details about it can be found at www.education.qld.gov.au/staff/development/ideas.

The schools were unified by the shared objective of implementing strategies to support values education in three main ways:

- through a whole school approach which sought to connect values to all aspects of school life, especially by actively seeking to work with parents
- through infusing values education into key learning areas by improving teaching repertoires and ensuring that teachers were using a common language and values-rich content
- by clearly articulating target values that were identified in local communities.

The five-year values journey undertaken in this cluster demonstrates how values can form the centrepiece of teacher professional transformation. Other reported effects include broader community relationships and stronger and more positive relationships between students and teachers, and teachers and teachers.

Harlaxton State School’s particular project focus was to create a values-based pedagogical framework consisting of a vision, explicitly articulated underpinning values and a school-wide pedagogy. Through engagement with IDEAS, Wilsonton State School and Wilsonton Campus (8–10) developed a pedagogical framework underpinned by explicit values.

It was known that the Access Program needed to deal with content such as sex education, drug education and bullying (these are systemic requirements). It was also known that these issues would link to values education. A more subtle and complex understanding that emerged over time was that while drug and sex education and bullying comprised the teaching content, values education was the process. As the cluster coordinator said:

Values education is about pedagogy and not necessarily about the content that you are teaching.

The four Wilsonton values are the organisers for the Access Program. An example of the process teachers followed in developing values-rich curriculum is that while the content of a session may be conflict resolution, the value being highlighted is success and recognition. As the values facilitator for the cluster clarified:

What you have to do is make sure that in the series of lessons there is specific and ongoing reference to values ... the explicit nature of those Wilsonton values is good, but the focus has to return to the pedagogy again.

The cluster arrangement was used to enable the schools to meet regularly, support each other, share ideas (as well as various burdens) and use the creative pressure that comes with the need to report to each other to further the projects in each school.

A whole school approach was used to advance the project. Each school sought staff and community participation in common ways. The issues raised by the values education project – the explicit teaching of the Values for Australian Schooling – were discussed in staff meetings and aligned with existing curriculum arrangements. All schools cross-referenced the IDEAS school values with the values identified in the National Framework, a process that added meaning to both sets of values. While the cluster was pursuing similar goals, individual schools used different approaches to suit the specific needs of their local contexts. For example, at Harlaxton State School, the school community contributed to developing its ‘whole child values education approach’. After an initial audit of the informal values approaches used by teachers, it was found that values were being
taught inconsistently in an ad hoc manner. Some teachers drew on a variety of available health and wellbeing programs to address issues such as student resilience and self-esteem.

Staff recognised that the curriculum would be enhanced with the addition of planned, explicit teaching of values. Thus Harlaxton State School developed a whole child vision, and its school values – resilience, respect and relationships – were used as umbrella headings for units of a values education approach that ran weekly in pastoral care groups.

Central to this staff understanding of the importance of a consistent approach to values education, was their ongoing professional learning over the course of the project. As the UAN adviser for the cluster noted:

These teachers recognised the importance of both reflection on practice and professional conversations with colleagues – and working in cycles, to allow for refinement and ongoing development of the program. The success of these teachers further reinforced the IDEAS notion that teachers are the key to successful change.

At Wilsonton State School, strong leadership from the cluster coordinator resulted in professional learning sessions demonstrating the links between Stages 1 and 2 of the VEGPSP. This included providing an overview of the Stage 1 findings and helped to chart the course of Stage 2.

The school’s first action was to complete a year-level values audit of the school curriculum. From this it was apparent that some year levels focused heavily on values while others did not. At the end of 2006, the staff revisited the school’s IDEAS core values of teamwork, seeking opportunities, meeting challenges and success and recognition, and tried to align them with the Values for Australian Schooling through a matrix. All staff addressed the key question: How will we move from discrete values education lessons to support cross-curricular values approaches in all key learning areas? Collegiate groups worked together to identify the values in their classrooms and how they fitted into the matrix. The matrices were collated and a whole school matrix produced. This resulted in a detailed snapshot of the school’s core values and what they looked like in classrooms throughout the school. This strategy provided direct involvement of all staff and built ownership of the process.

Toowoomba North actively sought to work in partnership with parents. Over time, and after a series of initiatives such as parent forums, newsletters and inviting parents into the school to join the values education pastoral care committee, relationships of greater trust and depth grew. As the UAN adviser observed:

There was a significant shift in understanding during the values education program ... initially, the stated aim had been ... to reflect the values of the community. This was problematic – the communities were diverse and there could be no assumption that common values were held or that they should necessarily be reflected by the school. It became clear that working with the community in values education was a more subtle project requiring more than reflecting the values of the community. Being explicit about the values that had been collaboratively identified – and working with the community to deepen understanding of what these might mean in action – was perceived to be a more significant endeavour.

The cluster reported some key changes in student–teacher relationships. As more teachers became familiar and comfortable with the values approaches being used in the cluster, they were able to make adjustments and improvements to their teaching. The UAN adviser referred to some outcomes in this regard:

A December 2007 teacher survey indicated that not all teachers were making the link between what is in their planning document and their pedagogy. It was suggested that a teacher may include values in their planning, and in their lessons – but if they don’t see the significance of this, then the students pick up the message that this is not important. It was also observed (within the school) that where teachers were seeing the importance of establishing relationships and of respecting their students – this was reflected in the behaviour of their students.

In general, the teachers who were not embracing the values of ‘relationships’ and ‘respect’ were experiencing the most difficulty with their students’ behaviour. Where teachers are embracing values education as something that is important and to be embedded in practice – their pedagogy is enhanced. Where teachers perceive that the problem lies with the students (a deficit approach), the quality of teaching does not improve. This was a crucial insight.