E-SCHOOLS: YORKE PENINSULA CLUSTER
South Australia

Creating Futures through Values and Sustainability

Cluster coordinators: Michelle Hawthorne, Port Vincent Primary School and Beth Faulkner, Stansbury Primary School

Participating schools:
- Port Vincent Primary School
- Edithburgh Primary School
- Stansbury Primary School

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

Key messages
1. Shared leadership assisted this cluster with common understandings about values education, whole of cluster community and meaningful values action.
2. In a cluster characterised by schools with small cohorts of students, values education forums and activities provide a vehicle for students to share, exchange and debate a diversity of values and opinions.
3. Students own and make strong connections between values education and behaviours that they see as useful in their everyday lives. As one student put it, ‘We don’t need school rules. We should use our values. They are the rules for life.’
4. A most significant change in this cluster is a cultural shift from perceiving school rules as regulators of student behaviour to focusing on school and community values and restorative justice as key drivers in developing self-knowledge and self-discipline in students.
5. Teacher reflective practice that focuses on the whole child rather than the transfer of key learning area curriculum content leads to transformed teacher practice.
The E-Schools: Yorke Peninsula Cluster was established initially within the South Australian Sustainable Schools Program. The sites share common visions and values and have undertaken collaborative projects over the past few years. These have included student forums regarding sustainable practices, staff professional learning related to pedagogical practice, and values projects in the areas of community history and environmental education.

In the Creating Futures through Values and Sustainability project, a set of values was developed at each site, using collaborative and inclusive practices through student and community consultation. At each site values were aligned with the National Framework.

Parent feedback within the cluster acknowledged that one of the strengths of small schools is the opportunity they provide for safe and supportive learning environments. On the other hand, challenges in this context include lack of social interaction with peers and an absence of opportunities to build resilience in students.

Staff undertook professional learning using the Values for Australian Schooling Kit and allied resources. The cluster also held values education forums at school, led by student representatives and an outside facilitator. The aim was to develop common understandings of sustainability and associated links to values education.

A major project focus was the ‘kids teaching kids’ approach to sharing learning. This approach was an acknowledged part of the community capacity-building strategy. Students chose to use a rainbow as a symbol for the forum. As one student said:

Rainbows, like values, exist but can’t be touched; you just know they are there. … Rainbows mean a promise … Rainbows are part of creation stories and link environment and rules for living.

The community manifesto that arose from the ‘kids teaching kids’ forums led to environmental actions at sites throughout the remainder of the project. It also firmly established links between values and environmental sustainability.

As a cluster, staff set out to identify links between values and pedagogy based on a key cluster focus question:

What teaching and learning strategies will enhance community capacity building and achieve a shared vision of sustainability?

In order to address this question, the cluster examined how it built relationships with students through the explicit teaching of values, and how it supported teachers to reflect on and change their pedagogy and further develop positive attitudes and practices to support sustainability.

One of the key activities was to align the values in the National Framework with the UNESCO Educating for a Sustainable Future framework. The product of this exercise is reproduced in Table 3 on page 97, and demonstrates how local, national and global goals can become a focus for whole school values education planning.

Multiple year levels in each grade were characteristic of these small schools. Students were therefore very responsive to the transformation occurring within the school, and to whole school approaches to teaching and learning.

The schools believed that an inquiry process would be the most appropriate pedagogy to work with students towards a values education approach to the UNESCO sustainability framework. As a cluster, the schools undertook a values audit and were supported by the values education contact officers from the South Australian Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS). The purpose of this was to give each site some initial baseline data from which they could assess progress as the project unfolded.

For the first two weeks of school in 2007 and 2008, the cluster conducted two weeks of focused values activities. These activities sought to engage school communities in explicit site-based classroom practices aimed at engaging students, developing their social skills, enhancing their sense of responsibility in intercultural, local, national and global contexts, and building their resilience through inquiry-based learning activities.

At Port Vincent Primary School, for example, staff, community and students were involved in determining a Site Learning Plan. Values were adopted as the umbrella under which this plan now operates. Staff planned a Building for Success start to the school year as an extension of the Bounce
Back and Well Being Framework programs. The program also included developing the students’ Well Being Ambassadors project, individual resilience and cooperation skills.

Students and staff participated in a values audit to determine their level of awareness, understanding and use of values in a range of both school and broader contexts. They were asked a range of questions both as a group and individually. The report provided the school with a guide to the students’ understanding of values and their relationship to learning and schooling.

After this rich values activity, units of work were developed that focused on environmental sustainability in the local Yorke Peninsula area. Units developed included:

- Monitoring of Coobowie inlet with District Council of Yorke Peninsula
- Examining ecological footprints: alternative energy
- Habitat (including monitoring of species)
- Tourism and impacts of humans on the area
- Comparisons: built and natural environments.

Groups undertook monitoring of the Marina and Reef Watch activities and forwarded results to the Conservation Council of South Australia. Units of work relating to the biodiversity of the Gulf St Vincent were developed. Some of these have been shared with teachers at a Southern Shores conference. From these units of work, students became more aware of the wellbeing of others and of impacts on environments.

There have been a number of outcomes from the work in the cluster. As a teacher commented:

Students have been very positive about their involvement in cluster activities and have been able to sustain relationships as they have worked in the same groups each time we meet.

Another notable outcome was the perception that student cluster leaders developed confidence, and willingly undertook leadership roles. For example, one student from each school presented at a Twilight Values Seminar, facilitated by a values education contact officer from DECS in South Australia. The students negotiated their presentation with school coordinators.
### Table 3: Aligning the National Framework with the UNESCO sustainability framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools</th>
<th>UNESCO: Educating for a Sustainable Future</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fair go</td>
<td>Participation: being a proactive and productive individual and group member; contributing to the ecological and social wealth of the community and the nation; active participation in decision-making and democratic processes. Participation also implies the need for inclusive systems and processes that promote equity and enable students to become advocates for their local environment and communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Care and compassion</td>
<td>Care: planning and acting with concern for the wellbeing of self, others and all species; respect for self and others; a commitment to principles of social justice; and opposing prejudice, dishonesty and injustice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Responsibility: being accountable for your actions (as individuals and in groups); resolving differences in constructive, non-violent and peaceful ways; contributing to society and to civic life; taking action for the environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrity; honesty and trustworthiness</td>
<td>Critical thinking: promoting, supporting and undertaking critical reflection on systems, assumptions and values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing your best</td>
<td>Excellence: pursuing the best practice possible in moving towards sustainability; striving for the highest personal achievement in all aspects of schooling and individual and community action, work and lifelong learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding, tolerance and inclusion</td>
<td>Cooperation: committing to work together to achieve common goals; this requires negotiation.</td>
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