

## **National Values Education Forum 2007**

### **Values Education in Practice: Making Connections**

Thursday, 3 May 2007 and Friday, 4 May 2007, Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre, Melbourne, Victoria

#### **Day 2 Student report**

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On Friday 4 May, three of us from Antonine College, Alice (Year 9), Lara (Year 9) and Nadine (Year 10) attended The National Values Education Forum at the Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre to learn more about values education and how our schools can be improved. Values in education are important because they determine who we are and what we can achieve and how we can live together.

When we arrived, we attended the welcome by Mr Tony Cook, from the Department of Education, Victoria and listened to the Keynote Speaker, Professor Andrew Furco. Professor Furco spoke about the differences that he has noticed between values education in America and those in Australia. He also told us about ways that America has started to improve teaching values, not only in the form of speaking about it but also experiencing it. He made many good points, like that finding common cultural, social and religious customs can be difficult in multicultural groups, and that teachers must be sure about their own opinions and beliefs before they teach them - 'they cannot teach it until they understand themselves'.

After listening to the Keynote address, we had the opportunity to attend a workshop on how values are taught at schools in Dandenong. Dandenong is one of the most multicultural areas in Victoria with 54% of residents born overseas and more than 80 languages spoken at the secondary schools. Lynne Kemp, a teacher who works with the seven schools in the Dandenong Cluster, spoke about how they have started to hold forums for people in the school community to work together on values. The first forum they held was for teachers, the second was for students and the third was for the community and included people such as religious leaders, police and parents. At the forums people participated in activities (like naming and ranking different values) and discussions about challenging questions, such as 'Do values affect behaviour or does behaviour affect values?'

During morning tea, we sat down with Trish Jones, a Professor from Temple University in America. Among other questions we asked her 'How can values education help stop bullying?'. Her response was that there should be values of dignity, respect and education to deal with bullying. She also said that it is critical for parents and teachers to be involved in discussions about values and that Australia has a lot to teach America about values in education. She believes that the students of today help later generations and must discuss future values that they would like to see in their community. In America, Service Learning Programs, especially in primary and secondary schools, work on homelessness, poverty, racism and much more.

*Values Education for Australian Schooling: National Values Education Forum 2007: Day 2 Student report*

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After speaking to Professor Jones, we attended a session by Catherine Devine, who teaches at St Monica's College. She spoke about the Socratic circles project, which focuses on many cultures forming one community. The main aim of this project is to help students from different backgrounds interact with one another to discuss important issues in society. She said that it was Socrates who had a theory that 'Disciplined conversation maximises learning'. The schools that are involved in the 'Interfaith and Intercultural Cluster' who use Socratic Circles include St Monica's College, Thornbury High School, Australian International Academy (King Khalid), The King David School and Siena College.

During lunchtime we were able to sit down and speak with Professor Andy Furco from the University of California-Berkeley. He told us about a program set up by Dr. Jenny Lee called 'Head, Heart and Hands' which focuses on not only teaching values, but also applying and experiencing them. This program has been put into practice in Northern California, but Professor Furco says it could work in Australia if enough people support it and work together. He also spoke about different values being appropriate in different situations and a question he asked us was 'If you are sitting in a room full of people from one country would you follow their traditions to be respectful or stand up for your own?'

From our experience at the Forum we learnt a lot more about how important values are, how they can be applied, and how they can affect our community. Using some of the ideas and advice about teaching values that we got from the conference we are now eager to start working to apply some changes to our own school community. We will start by setting up our own school forum and hopefully from there it will be built upon and help improve not only the school itself, but also the community.