The Values in Action Schools Project

Introducing VASP

The Values in Action Schools Project (VASP) is the third round of values education grants projects in schools funded by the Australian Government and managed by Curriculum Corporation. In October 2008, all Australian schools were invited to apply for a VASP grant. Following a rigorous selection process, 15 clusters of schools from across Australia were selected to undertake values approaches using an action research model.

Every state and territory is represented by at least one cluster and the schools involved are from diverse locations, levels and sectors. Clusters include three primary schools in Perth, ten secondary schools in Greater Brisbane, three Catholic schools in Far North Queensland and ten juvenile detention centres Australia-wide.

Broadly, VASP cluster projects address the following areas:

- teachers and students integrating values into the curriculum (Lanyon Cluster of Schools, ACT)
- Values Education projects to support student resilience and wellbeing (Catholic Schools of Clarence, NSW; Australian Juvenile Detention Centres School Cluster, SA, ACT, QLD, NSW, and TAS)
- helping students to transition throughout all levels of schooling (Flinders Park – Whyalla Link Values Cluster, SA)
- exploring ways of reporting to parents on values education outcomes (Reporting Values Cluster, WA)
- exploring poverty through a values-based student-led action research project (Southern Highlands Schools of NSW)
- embedding values education through service learning (Greater Brisbane Schools, QLD)
- using values education within the performing arts to foster self-esteem and community engagement (The Beenleigh Believe, Achieve, Succeed Cluster, QLD)
- using student-centred inquiry to connect in real and meaningful ways with community (Tasmanian Values Cluster)
- promoting positive self-image, inclusiveness, tolerance and respect for others (Maroondah Education Coalition, VIC)
- teacher professional development in values education through master classes and mentoring (Melbourne Eastern Regions Values Cluster, VIC)
- using e-learning and virtual world environments to explore values education through philosophical engagement and debate (Cross Border Values Community, SA, NT, WA and TAS; Skoolaborate, NSW, QLD and VIC)
- values education pedagogies in Indigenous community contexts (Far North Queensland Cluster, QLD; Palmerston Values Cluster, NT)
One of the key objectives of the VASP is to engage parents, teachers and students in working as a community of practice to deepen their shared understandings of how values inform teaching and learning and the whole school experience, both within and beyond the curriculum.

The successful clusters commenced their projects in December 2008 and will report on outcomes in October 2009. A final report will be available on the Values Education website in early 2010.

Snapshots of the successful cluster projects are available on the Values Education website.

Key Features of VASP

Cluster Support Groups have been established to assist each cluster throughout the life of the project. These consist of the two coordinators from each cluster, a University Advisor appointed by Curriculum Corporation, a Curriculum Corporation Cluster Contact, and the relevant State and Territory Values Education Contact Officers. University Advisors have an ongoing support role in relation to the research, planning and academic rigour of the projects. The Cluster Support Group for each cluster is in regular contact and meets twice during the lifetime of the VASP to monitor and assist clusters in their action research, collection of data and mapping of cluster progress to the Project Plan.

A second distinguishing characteristic of the VASP is the range of communications aimed at disseminating information across clusters and providing a support network. The Values Education website is VASP’s premier information and communication exchange centre. The Values in Action Schools Project Group (VASP Group), an online private community space with a discussion forum, resources and other tools, has been established for use by the clusters. Discussion groups have also been set up for the University Advisors and the Values Education Project Advisory Committee (VEPAC).

VEPAC, comprising representatives of school, parent and teacher umbrella organisations, state and territory jurisdictions, Independent and Catholic sectors, DEEWR and the Australian Council of Deans, supports and advises the project team.
VASP and Research/Data Collection

One of the most innovative aspects of the VASP is the way in which a range of evidence gathering tools have been developed and embedded into the action research model. The VASP research comprises two elements:

- local research collected at individual school/cluster level by cluster project staff, developed with the assistance of University Advisors, and
- whole-of-project data collection which includes both qualitative and quantitative data aspects. This whole-of-project research is managed by Curriculum Corporation and includes parent, student and teacher cohorts.

Some data collection approaches being used by clusters as part of their local research collection include:

- pre- and post-project surveys for parents and/or students
- analysis of cluster forums conducted with parents, students, teachers or communities
- school climate surveys
- development of an hypothesis to be tested during the life of the project
- presentation of artefacts demonstrating ‘then and now’.

Curriculum Corporation is managing the whole-of-project qualitative and quantitative data collection. The quantitative research will be pre-project and post-project teacher perception surveys. The surveys seek to ascertain teachers’ personal and professional responses to values education issues. The surveys are based on the following four issues.

1. What role do you as a teacher play in values education?
2. How are values addressed in your school community?
3. What is the nature and purpose of values education in schooling?
4. How do students in your school act on their values?

The questions within these areas are informed by the ten good practices in values education presented in At the Heart of What We Do: Values Education at the Centre of Schooling: Final Report of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2.

Judy Scotney and Sue Wallace from the Greater Brisbane Schools – Values Education through Service Learning Cluster at the first Briefing Session
The Most Significant Change (MSC) technique is the qualitative research tool used with all clusters. The MSC is a story-based participatory evaluation tool which helps to identify both expected and unexpected project impacts. The technique delivers a rich picture of what is happening whilst encouraging analysis of the data and asking participants to discuss the stories and identify why one change might be more significant than another.

An Evaluation Summit on 16 October 2009 will focus on reflections and learnings which emerge from project implementation. More details on the research will be included in forthcoming VASP newsletters.

VASP National Briefing Sessions

VASP Cluster Coordinators were invited to the first National Briefing Session in Melbourne on 10 December 2008 to introduce the project, outline expectations and provide support materials for getting started and developing a project plan.

A second National Briefing Session took place in Canberra on 28 and 29 April 2009. This Briefing Session set out to inform, workshop and reflect on the VASP research techniques, and provide an opportunity for clusters to share project progress, network and prepare for their upcoming Mid-Project Reports.

The distance schools have travelled in their understanding, action research and commitment to the values education approach since December 2008 was evidenced by the feedback at the Briefing Session. The level of enthusiasm and professionalism generated a ‘buzz’, serving as a catalyst for further reflection on the nature and importance of this work.
Have you discovered your school’s copies of the latest resources from the Values Education program?

If you haven’t, then it’s time to enjoy some new, innovative and exciting resources to enliven the second half of 2009!

Copies of the new Values Education resources were mailed to the principals of all primary and secondary schools in Australia in April 2009. Multi-campus schools and combined primary and secondary schools will have received the resources below.

Building Values Across the Whole School

This series contains three books. Two Teaching and Learning Units, (primary and secondary editions), each includes 16 units of work that support the integration of values education across a range of learning areas such as English, SOSE, Science, Drama and Mathematics. The third book, Professional Learning Program, consists of three modules that build understanding and confident values educators.

Supporting Student Wellbeing Through Values Education

These books (which come in both primary and secondary editions) complement and expand on the ideas introduced in previous resources and draw on the experiences and learning of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Projects.

Each book comprises two sections that focus on developing student wellbeing and resilience through values education. The first section, ‘Understanding Values’, consists of six values dilemmas that can be used across a range of learning areas. The dilemmas engage students with real-life situations that require them to examine their values and those of others in a structured and supportive pedagogical framework. The second section, ‘Values in Action’, consists of six modules designed to integrate values learning in contexts beyond the classroom. These modules encourage students to enact, reflect on and engage with values learning in a range of extracurricular activities, including service learning, performance and online projects.

Download the Resources, Free to Australian Schools

Additional copies of the above resources are available for free to teachers in Australian schools via the Values Education website, www.valueseducation.edu.au. The access key is published in printed editions of the resources or is available to schools on request by emailing maureen.gustus@curriculum.edu.au.

Please note that third party copyright restrictions prohibit the distribution and/or publication of the access key or the resources on a publically accessible website or via email.
The Values Education website (www.valueseducation.edu.au) provides up-to-date information on the Australian Government’s Values Education program and on values education activities for school communities throughout Australia.

New content on the website includes the Values Education resources, Building Values Across the Whole School: Teaching and Learning Units and Professional Learning Program, and Supporting Student Wellbeing Through Values Education series.

You will also find the most recent values education reports, including:

- 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
- Project to Test and Measure the Impact of Values Education on Student Effects and School Ambience and
- Values and Other Issues in the Education of Young Australians: A Study Among Parents with Children at Non-Government Schools.
In addition to the VASP and the recently published resources for schools, the Australian Government’s impetus in the area of Values Education has seen a number of important national initiatives emerge. These include the following.

**National Values Education Partnerships Projects**

A number of National Values Education Partnerships Projects with key stakeholders including peak parent, teacher, principal and teacher educator organisations, have also been commissioned in 2009. These projects aim to improve and leverage the existing work on teacher professional learning as well as targeting pre-service teacher and parental engagement. They will include:

- an online module, the L5 at Work: leadership learning online, to support Australian school leaders, which will be available free of charge through the Leaders Lead website (www.leaderslead.edu.au) by October 2009
- professional learning for teacher educators to ensure that values education becomes an essential component of quality teacher education
- a values education information kit for parents whose children are entering the Australian school system for the first time, and
- research on parental and community engagement strategies for promoting interfaith and intercultural understanding in schools in a sustainable and meaningful way.

**Values Education Professional Learning Program for Teachers**

The Government is supporting state and territory education authorities with funding to conduct a Values Education Professional Learning Package for teachers. This professional learning includes forums, twilight seminars, conferences and teacher development days. More information about this program, including specific dates and activities, is available from the relevant State and Territory Contact Officer. Their details can be found at www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/val_about_states_and_territories,8772.htm.

**Future Resources**

The final set of the Values for Australian Schooling suite of resources will be released in late 2009 and will focus on developing intercultural and interfaith understandings. These resources include a Big Book, a digital resource (A World of Values) and an accompanying professional learning program for teachers.
The 2009 National Values Education Conference, Values in Action: Shaping Positive Futures, was conducted by the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) on behalf of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations in Canberra on Thursday 30 April and Friday 1 May.

Attracting approximately 250 national and international participants, the 2009 conference reinforced Australia’s role as a world leader in the field of values education, and significantly strengthened the national conversation on leading and sustaining values education in Australian schools.

Keynote speakers over the two days included Dr Ruth Deakin Crick from the University of Bristol, UK; Professor Terry Lovat from the University of Newcastle; Ameeta Watail from Springdales School in New Delhi, India; and John Marsden, author and principal of the Candlebark School, Victoria.

One of the highlights was a panel discussion in which school students reflected on their involvement with values education. In addition, 12 workshop sessions were held. These included four workshops presented by clusters from the current Values in Action Schools Project (VASP).

Further details of the National Values Education Conference can be found on the Values Education website.
In August 2008, the Australian Government published a report detailing the outcomes and learning from the second round of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Projects (VEGPSP) implemented in Australian schools in 2007–2008. 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 presents the stories of the 25 clusters of schools provided with grants to implement a range of values education initiatives based on the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools. The action research projects were provided with a range of supports, including access to university-based education advisors, information-sharing briefing sessions, mentors and attendance at the National Values Education Forum in May 2008.

The ten principles of good practice in values education distilled from the Stage 2 of the VEGPSP are as follows.

1. Establish and consistently use a common and shared values language across the school.
2. Use pedagogies that are values-focused and student-centred within all curriculum.
3. Develop values education as an integrated curriculum concept, rather than as a program, an event or an addition to curriculum.
4. Explicitly teach values so students know what the values mean and how the values are lived.
5. Implicitly model values and explicitly foster the modelling of values.
6. Develop relevant and engaging values approaches connected to local and global contexts and which offer real opportunity for student agency.
7. Use values education to consciously foster intercultural understanding, social cohesion and social inclusion.
8. Provide teachers with informed, sustained and targeted professional learning and foster their professional collaborations.
9. Encourage teachers to take risks in their approaches to values education.
10. Gather and monitor data for continuous improvement in values education.

In the words of one of the university associates working with the clusters:

The cause of values education is essential, in my opinion, to Australian education. It is the ingredient that can make the difference to education in the Australian context. Students who attend a school where they feel secure from physical and psychological harm, who are met by teachers who model ethical behaviours and who require such behaviours from their students will achieve well in the academic sphere. Why? The answer is obvious. Because the students will be more emotionally stable, they will apply themselves to learning with greater alacrity; they will be more at ease with school personnel and will achieve greater self-discipline.

Extract from Emeritus Professor Robert Crotty’s report as the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2 University Associates Network member for South Australia.
State and Territory Values Education

Values Education Contact Officers provide a link between national values education initiatives and state and territory partnerships, and provide a valuable resource for schools to access local values education information relevant to their school communities.

This includes information about:

- Values Education policies
- initiatives
- professional learning
- other activities.

To contact your State and Territory Values Education Contact Officer or for updates about local values education initiatives in your state or territory, please visit the Values Education website at:

www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/val_about_states_and_territories,8772.html

Queensland
www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/val_queensland,8667.html

South Australia
www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/val_south_australia,8668.html

Tasmania
www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/val_tasmania,8669.html

Victoria
www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/val_victoria,8670.html

Western Australia
www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/val_western_australia,8671.html

ACT
www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/val_australian_capital_territory,8664.html

New South Wales
www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/val_new_south_wales,8665.html

Northern Territory
www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/val_northern_territory,8666.html