The Journey

Values in Action Schools Project (VASP) Update

After ten months of focused, intense activity, the Values in Action Schools Project (VASP) is drawing to a close. The first newsletter in August 2009 outlined the aims of the VASP and descriptions of the 15 cluster projects across Australia. This current newsletter highlights the voices and experiences of the VASP cluster leaders as they reflect on three terms’ work. A number of the University Advisors who have supported the VASP projects also comment on projects with which they were engaged. Their observations underscore the assistance and important research role played by the University Advisors throughout the project.

Clusters have formally concluded their VASP action research and all final reports were submitted on 30 October 2009. A distinguishing feature of the VASP has been the breadth and depth of data collection and research tools used, both at the local cluster level and across the entire project. Local evidence was developed through approaches such as arts and service learning activity, collection of artefacts, forums, publishing magazines, teaching and learning measurement tools, unit writing and administering surveys to a cluster cohort.

This data will be analysed and incorporated into a final report on the Values in Action Schools Project to be submitted to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) in early 2010. While the VASP may be coming to an end, many clusters are embedding their learnings from values education into 2010 school planning.

Events and Opportunities

A key objective of the VASP projects was to include and involve the three partners of the school community – students, parents and teachers – in values education in action. A number of key events and opportunities have paved the way for these partnerships to develop across the VASP clusters.

The Curriculum Corporation VASP cluster team has been privileged to be present at a number of significant milestones in the clusters’ progress. Between late August and early October 2009, Dr Jenny Wajsenberg and Jane Weston, Curriculum Corporation VASP Project Managers, travelled to each of the 15 clusters to conduct the Most Significant Change (MSC) story collection. These visits ranged from Tasmania to far north Queensland, the Northern Territory to regional South Australia.

The MSC is a participatory evaluation technique involving groups of parents, students and teachers telling stories about major project impacts from their
particular perspectives. In total, approximately 120 parents and similar numbers of teachers and students participated in the MSC story collection which asked two simple questions: ‘Over the past eight months, what has been the most significant change to emerge from your involvement in the values education project?’ and ‘Why is this significant for you/your community?’ The storytelling and choice of what was ‘most significant’ enabled participants to articulate what was important to them and why.

A number of stories were profoundly moving. Parents spoke of changing relationships with their children and different kinds of conversations in the home. Teachers reflected on the transformational impact that the VASP has had on their teaching practice and thinking. An important impact of student engagement in the projects was that students felt they had a voice and a forum in which to become partners in their learning experience. Their reflections demonstrated the power that values education has on self-knowing.

Evaluation Summit

The 24 MSC stories collected from each cluster were transcribed and sent back to the cluster to select four for consideration at the VASP Evaluation Summit panel held in Melbourne on 16 October 2009. The Summit was a significant event, bringing together over 100 people including parent, teacher and student representatives from the clusters, representatives from Curriculum Corporation and DEEWR, University Advisors, and State and Territory Values Contact Officers. Its primary purpose was to finalise the MSC process of selecting stories that demonstrated the most significant changes to school communities resulting from the VASP work. The Summit also included the creation of artwork by the attending students and presentations from each cluster.

As schools head back from the summer holidays, VASP project attention now switches entirely to Curriculum Corporation and the development of the Final Report. More on that in the third and final newsletter to be published at the end of Term 1, 2010.

VEPAC

The VASP has been supported by a Values Education Project Advisory Committee (VEPAC) which met on 24 September to consider the project progress and to discuss the VASP Final Report to DEEWR. VEPAC has representation from the jurisdictions and educational sectors as well as organisations representing parents, teachers and the higher education sector. It is an important committee whose expertise has informed the decisions and processes of the VASP. VEPAC has served as a national forum for discussion and consideration of the contribution values education makes to schools, teaching and learning, student wellbeing and parent engagement.
The following snapshots of cluster experiences and University Advisors’ reflections highlight some of the Values in Action Schools Project achievements.

Cluster Voices
Australian Juvenile Detention Schools Cluster – Engaging the Disengaged: A Focus on Wellbeing (National Project)
Cluster Coordinators: Gerri Walker and Richard Manning
Twenty-six teachers, together with over 40 youth workers and 400 students from ten juvenile detention centres across Australia, including South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland, Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania, were part of this unique project. Working within a juvenile detention setting imposed limitations on curriculum delivery, and the work demonstrated different ways that the centres could engage their students in values education.

The focus of the project was to implement values education approaches with an emphasis on student resilience and wellbeing using the pedagogy of ‘giving’. The range of activities included student artwork, self-reflection, surveys, and three national gatherings of staff to discuss and share their work. Explicit conversations about values and the act of ‘giving of and beyond ourselves’ were embedded in the curriculum of each centre.

An important aspect of the project was the development of ‘impact stories’ written by teachers and students.

The project demonstrated a positive shift in staff attitudes and openness and the opportunity for teachers and youth workers to collaborate in using values language with the students. The centres reported reduced incidence of negative behaviour and also of racial abuse. Staff reported energy and enthusiasm and a sense of coherence; they also reported calmer classrooms during the project. In one centre the students worked together to create an artwork for a women’s refuge as solace for their plight, indicating that students had internalised the notion of ‘giving of and beyond themselves’.

The most notable outcome of the project was ‘an increased sense of hope by students, through a sense of worth in the present’.

Clarence Cluster Schools Project (New South Wales)
Cluster Coordinators: Bernadette and Jenny Triglone
Engaging over 200 teachers across 10 Catholic primary schools on the New South Wales north coast, this project aimed to build student resilience and wellbeing and improve academic and social outcomes through implicit and explicit teaching of values. A three-tiered approach addressing curriculum content, process and application sought to embed values-rich messages in units of work written by staff across the cluster, following intensive professional development in values education approaches. The units focus on resilience and wellbeing and support the social and emotional learning curriculum goals of the diocese.

Four units of work were developed, using an inquiry approach to learning. Selected values were explicitly highlighted in the purpose section of each unit, and a range of metacognitive strategies were used to enhance student engagement. Select units from the Australian Government’s Supporting Student Wellbeing Through Values Education
resource package were also used during the project. Each locally written unit was made available using Moodle digital technology and is accessible from the Catholic Education Office Online Learning Centre.

**Connecting Values Education and Shifting Student Attitudes within the Palmerston Cluster (Northern Territory)**

**Cluster Coordinators: Sue Beynon and Jo Wynn**

In a fast-growing residential corridor 20 minutes south of Darwin, four primary schools in the Palmerston Cluster participated in the Values in Action Schools Project. Specific school-based activities were built around explicitly teaching values with a student action focus.

Activities included growing home produce, rock climbing, caring for animals, exploring respect and responsibility in sport through interviewing football superstars, and encouraging random acts of kindness in everyday life.

‘Would it (explicit values education) make a difference to students’ attitudes?’ was the major question that teachers posed. Teachers found that students displayed more empathy towards each other, including showing consideration to students who have special needs. They showed signs that they were more connected to each other and accepting of others. Through explicit values teaching, student participation in meaningful activities and the process of reflection on the activities, students’ attitudes and perceptions noticeably shifted from negative to more positive outlooks.

This project has demonstrated that students can change their negative thinking and habits of mind with sustained values education teaching approaches. Some profound impacts have been observed. Explicit values teaching has the potential to break negative cycles in students’ lives by giving them skills, understanding and self-knowledge to make responsible choices. Such empowerment can give them hope for success in their journey of life. Teachers participating in this project strongly believe that it has had a positive impact on the students, teachers and the school communities in Palmerston.

**Maroondah Education Cluster – A Multilayered Approach to Values Education (Victoria)**

**Cluster Coordinators: Lyn McGoldrick and Val Morelli**

The Maroondah Education Cluster (MEC) comprises three high schools and is part of a larger, well-established group of schools in the outer-eastern suburbs of Melbourne which have collaborated for several years in developing intercultural understanding. Although the four schools are located within five kilometres of each other, the student cohort ranges from newly arrived refugees in an English Language Centre attached to one of the schools, to families that have lived in the area for generations and who have had little contact with people from other cultures. The initial VASP Project Plan to produce the *Youth Voice* magazine and introduce the student, parent and teacher groups to each other in a joint forum led organically to a much more ambitious project.
The activities of the cluster included two forums – the second one initiated by students – emotional intelligence workshops, and a number of smaller projects which actively engaged students, parents and teachers in values conversations and discussion of difference. Students had the opportunity to participate on many levels: within their English, History, and Civics and Citizenship classes; producing radio shows for student radio station SYNfm; and participating in an art competition. A highlight of the project was a Cultural Day, where students, parents and teachers met with Sudanese refugees who spoke about their former lives and the transition to life in Australia.

The final celebration of the project was a student-initiated, student-led presentation evening. Through performance and presentations, students spoke of the transformative impact the project has had on their actions, and on the opportunity afforded them through the project to be self-aware and reflect on their values. The VASP project also drew parents into the schools as active participants in the events.

Artwork by Zoe, a Year 8 student at Ringwood SC from the Maroondah Education Cluster
‘We become not a melting pot, but a beautiful mosaic’
Dr Libby Tudball, University Advisor to the project observed:

‘The way that students stood and spoke about the depth of their learning through human rights research projects, through the development of their Youth Voice magazine, art programs and other activities was inspirational. They showed leadership, empathy, insight, and concern for humanity, and have demonstrated how valuing diversity and engaging student voice can happen in diverse ways.’

Through the multilayered approach, the MEC project gave their young people many avenues to voice their thoughts on issues related to cultural diversity within and beyond their local community, and thus contribute to the building of a respectful and inclusive community.

Reporting Values to Parents Cluster (Western Australia)
Cluster Coordinators: Veronica Morcom and Pamela Algar

This small cluster, comprising three primary schools in suburban Perth, took an innovative approach to actively engaging parents in values education. The schools are aspirational and parents seek good academic results, but are generally not active participants in pedagogy and dialogue.

The initial focus of the project was to look at the descriptors in the Western Australian reporting system to examine how values can be reported more clearly to parents. The teachers from the three schools met to negotiate rich examples of values education already happening in each school. They communicated with parents through student journals, newsletters and questionnaires. Through these methods, they established common threads for values language. Two community values events were organised at all schools, using the drama theme of ‘fantasy machines’ (Term 2) and ‘home grown heroes’ (Term 3) to create authentic contexts where parents could observe students engaged in ‘values in action’ through small cooperative group work across mixed year levels and engage with ‘deeper issues’ such as inclusion. These activities have demonstrated to parents the need to teach values explicitly, created a values vocabulary with the families, lifted awareness of how values permeate all aspects of our lives, and developed an appreciation that values education is a partnership between the home and school.

The expressions ‘partnership’ and ‘developing shared understandings’ about values within the school and home were commonly used in project reporting. The following comment from a parent sums up the power of this project:

‘Being involved in this project has allowed me to consolidate my values. I now feel strongly about explicit values education. Previously I thought the implicit stuff was enough. I think the values-driven behaviour becomes instinctive, but I can now see that it is really important to teach children how to articulate values and communicate using a values language.’
University Advisors’ Reflections

Each VASP project was assigned a University Advisor whose role has been to support the cluster in planning their action research and in the collection of evidence of the values education work being carried out in the cluster. The excerpts below provide another window through which to view the work of the VASP clusters.

Beenleigh Cluster (Queensland)

University Advisor: Dr Marian Lewis

The Beenleigh Believe, Achieve, Succeed Cluster: Out of Apathy – A Creative Journey sets the scene for the remarkable work being carried out by four state schools in the Beenleigh/Eagleby area south of Brisbane. Beenleigh High School, together with Beenleigh, Eagleby and Eagleby South primary schools, have engaged in an amazing journey of values exploration, collaboration and service learning. An outstanding feature of this project is the way that creative arts have been used as a means of self-discovery, initially for the teachers in the project and then for 120 Year 6 and Year 7 students. In a culminating day the students and teachers agreed on a service learning project, through a wonderfully inclusive and creative process. The high school students have shown great leadership in the way they work with the primary schools. While the project outcome is not yet known, the journey these students and their teachers have undertaken is one of powerful engagement, values identification and enactment.

Cross Borders Cluster: To Infinity and Within (National Project)

University Advisor: Professor Robert Crotty

The Cross Borders Cluster comprises six schools separated by vast distances throughout Australia, from the Northern Territory to Tasmania, South Australia to Western Australia, hooked up in real time through technology. The cluster was originally formed during the previous Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2. In its VASP activity, the project has achieved much by building on its complexity from the isolation and separation of the six participant schools and the range of educational differences among them, to bring about real cohesion and shared understandings by means of a virtual community of values education learners. The leading questions of the VASP project were: ‘How do we develop students as deep reflective thinkers who are capable of making moral and ethical decisions?’ and ‘Could philosophy be a mechanism to explore the ethical frameworks which underpin the behaviours we identify as being values-based?’

Primary/secondary, non-Indigenous/Indigenous, rural/remote students were brought together by means of clever ‘e-collaborative environments’ to consider moral questions on a philosophical level. These ‘philosophical encounters’ were intended to allow students to consider value systems and to construct their own. Some of the outcomes of the project include growing student self-knowledge and willingness to share their thoughts, feelings and ideas in an uninhibited way; the deepening of teacher pedagogy and professional learning; and, above all, a shared explicit values language. Another offshoot of the project has been the development of cross-age communication, where Year 1 students engage in conversation online with Year 10 students.
Flinders Park–Whyalla Link Values Cluster – Transitions: Values-based Approaches (South Australia)

University Advisor: Professor Robert Crotty

This cluster of three schools – Flinders Park Primary School, Underdale High School and Fisk Street Primary School – set out to examine the use of supportive programs, linked to values education, to ensure a successful transition from one class/school to another. The project wanted to answer the question as to whether values education supported and improved transition. The University Advisor’s role within this cluster has been to give theoretical advice on making explicit the link between values education and student programs in the school, and to provide practical advice on the collection of data by surveys and by collecting letters written by students about to transition. The final elaboration of the project will demonstrate how values education practices can be used to support transition; and, using the challenges the project has encountered, to highlight the complexity of implementing values education programs.

Southern Highlands Cluster (New South Wales) and Skoolaborate Cluster (National Project)

University Advisor: Professor Susan Groundwater-Smith

This project involved working with two very different clusters as part of the VASP. One, located in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales, focused on the ways in which living in poverty confronts us all, irrespective of our own affluence. Students in six primary schools, ranging from tiny village schools tucked away in rolling hills, to regional centres, and one large comprehensive high school, came together to investigate areas of poverty and the manner in which we maintain a sense of respect and a ‘fair go’ for those facing enormous economic and social challenges. The students have become genuine activists and sought ways to both understand these difficult circumstances and assist with projects that can, to some extent, at least ameliorate the conditions.

The other project – Skoolaborate – is a national one. A group of metropolitan schools in Sydney, Melbourne and the Gold Coast are developing ways in which values can be understood in a virtual environment. On the face of it, this was a most unusual project; however, it has brought to the surface complex and universal issues concerned with human identity and the difference between rules and values.

Professor Groundwater-Smith, the University Advisor, describes Skoolaborate as a project of ‘learning side by side’ because, for her, this has been its great strength. The cluster arrangement allowed for disparate schools and their students, staff and parents to have a sustained contact, one with the other, with respect to a deep consideration of human values. It has also enabled the University Advisor to have ongoing conversations with clusters, both about the nature of the projects and also about teaching and learning in such different environments and handling such different media.
Values Educators Recognised for Outstanding Achievement

Two cluster leaders of Values Education school grants projects have won leadership and innovation awards as a result of their outstanding work.

Mark Sparvell, from Kandina Primary School (South Australia), has won the 2009 Microsoft Worldwide Innovative Teachers Award for Best Practice in Innovation in Collaboration, from a field of 450 international educational technology entrants. Mark is the leader of the VASP To Infinity and Within Cluster www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/val_vasp_cross-border_values_community,25927.html and was formerly the leader of the Cross Borders Cluster in the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2. The To Infinity and Within Cluster focuses on explorations in philosophy using information and communication technology to bring together students ranging from early primary to upper secondary schools. Working through a Web 2.0 Moodle, they have considered deep philosophical questions around values from very varied contexts.

Marion McKenzie, from Seaford 6–12 School (South Australia), was Highly Commended in the 2009 Australian Awards for Teaching Excellence, in the Excellence in Teaching Leadership category. Her award was for leading values education and socially just outcomes for all. Marion led the Sea and Vales Cluster www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/default.asp?id=15937 in the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2. The cluster project focused on a whole school approach to student wellbeing based on values education leading organisational change.

www.teachingaustralia.edu.au/ta/go/home/op/edit/pid/651
Four new values education resources were released in November 2009. Funded by the Australian Government, these resources focus on values education in intercultural and global contexts. The resources complement the existing Values Education website and the Values for Australian Schooling print and online resources delivered to schools over the past four years.

**Side by Side – big book for early years**

A big book for the early childhood classroom, *Side by Side* is designed for shared reading with lower primary students to promote intercultural understanding and community relationships. It tells a charming story of neighbours who visit one another, play together, help each other, and learn and grow together through times of change. While neighbours come and go from the houses, they all grow to an understanding of shared values and acceptance of difference.

*Side by Side* includes teacher notes. Additional teaching and learning activities are available on the Values Education website: [www.valueseducation.edu.au](http://www.valueseducation.edu.au)

One copy of *Side by Side* is being delivered to all Australian primary schools. Additional copies can be purchased from Curriculum Corporation’s online shop: [www.curriculum.edu.au](http://www.curriculum.edu.au)

**World of Values – online resource for Years 3–12**

*World of Values* is an exciting student-centred website ideal for interactive whiteboards, computer labs or classroom computers. The innovative resource explores values through personal, intercultural and global perspectives using a rich variety of digital resources.

*World of Values* explores five important themes: Communities, Peacemakers, Boundaries, Future Makers and The Big Questions which challenge students to expand their world view and explore issues outside their own perspectives. The activities encourage students to be independent thinkers and to develop an understanding of their own values and those of others. Within each theme, ten digital resources, usually short film clips, have been carefully selected to act as stimulus pieces for a range of learning activities and a broader discussion of values. Importantly, the pedagogy in *World of Values* builds from students’ current understandings and takes them to new places through discussion, reflection and, ultimately, taking action around new values understanding. The resource strongly models values education principles and pedagogies identified in the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stages 1 and 2.
World of Values includes a teacher guide for each theme and a Learning Pathway facility for teachers to customise their own lessons. It is available through the Values Education website: www.valueseducation.edu.au using an access key. For more information, contact Curriculum Corporation on (03) 9207 9600.

Teaching for Intercultural Understanding: Professional Learning Program – online resource for teachers

Teaching for Intercultural Understanding is a professional learning program for teachers that draws on the intercultural understandings highlighted in Side by Side and the World of Values. It is a teacher-centred resource that supports teachers in educating students about values in intercultural contexts. This professional learning program presents seven learning modules in PDF format with a self-paced or mediated learning methodology. It supports educators to develop deep knowledge and competencies in teaching for intercultural understanding.

Teaching for Intercultural Understanding is available through the Values Education website: www.valueseducation.edu.au

Values-centred Schools – A Guide – online resource for school leaders

Values-centred Schools – A Guide provides practical advice to school leaders in building a values-centred school culture using a whole school approach. This website resource describes organising frameworks to support best practice in implementing and monitoring a whole school values education approach. It is designed both for schools beginning to embed values education and for those looking to improve their practices.

The Guide is grounded in school practice. It contains authentic stories and resources gathered from schools across Australia including those that participated in the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project. It defines the ‘what and why’ of a whole school approach to values education and is an accessible, practical tool for school leaders.

Values-centred Schools – A Guide is available through the Values Education website: www.valueseducation.edu.au
Values Education, Quality Teaching and Service Learning — A Troika for Effective Teaching and Teacher Education

By Terence Lovat, Ron Toomey, Neville Clement, Robert Crotty and Thomas Neilsen

This book has emerged from the deep engagement of teacher educators in the Australian Government-funded values education initiative. Under the leadership of Professor Terence Lovat, the authors explore the effects on student learning that have been demonstrated through research and in projects concerned with values education, quality teaching and service learning, in Australia and internationally. The demonstrated effects concern transforming student behaviour and teacher–student relationships, improving the environment of learning, strengthening teacher and student resilience, and enhancing student satisfaction and engagement.

The authors draw on current national and international research and, in particular, the work of school clusters in the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project Stages 1 and 2, funded by the Australian Government and managed by Curriculum Corporation.

While many of the concepts and practices related to the troika of values education, quality teaching and service learning have transformed school environments and pedagogy, the book suggests that the time has come for teacher education to be transformed as well, to become the vital training arm for the twenty-first century that is its proper role.

The book is available from David Barlow Publishing, by writing to PO Box 651, Terrigal, NSW 2260, or by phone (02) 4351 8884 or fax (02) 4351 8885.