Values for Australian Schooling Newsletter

What’s making news in values education

The National Values Education Forum 2007

Values Education in Practice: Making Connections was the focus for this year’s forum. Over two days, connections were made between Australian and international research, between educators from across Australia, and between systems, sectors and parent organisations.

Dr Neil Hawkes, Director of the Association of Living Values, set the tone for the forum on the first day when he said, “Good schools are founded on good relationships that release the creative energy of everyone in the school” and that the principle of a values-based school is that “inner life is nourished through appropriate professional and personal development.”

He spoke of the real differences values education can make to students in terms of academic performance, confidence and self-reliance. A values-based school, he maintained, nurtures values by encouraging students and teachers to take time to reflect on their beliefs and actions.

Professor Andrew Furco, Director, International Center for Research on Civic Engagement and Service Learning, University of California–Berkeley, described values education as “something that we are seeing globally in terms of what we want to accomplish for our young people.” He argued that good values education teaches not only what values look and feel like, but also when it is appropriate to exercise them.

Professor Furco discussed the need to talk openly with students about the dominant perspectives presented through the media and popular culture and stressed the importance of not shying away from multi-values perspectives.

A range of workshops drawn from practising schools and associated projects demonstrated that there is no single way to implement values education. Projects ranged from service learning-based activities to creating sustainable worlds through problem solving. However, all projects shared a collective view that success depends upon engaging students in meaningful activities that resonate with shared values.

The forum concluded with a panel discussion about the need to connect to students by exploring values with them rather than having teachers imposing values on them. As one panellist said, "values education is a big idea, not a compartment.”

The full report of the National Values Education Forum 2007 can be accessed at:

Meeting, thinking and talking

**Good Practice Schools – meeting, sharing and recording the progress**

Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2 (VEGPSP-2) clusters met at the Second National Briefing Session to review and deepen the research components of their projects and share successful processes for implementing the National Framework. This meeting, the second of three to run over the life of the project, gave cluster schools the opportunity to discuss their projects’ successes and challenges. Practical workshops focused on developing participants’ case-writing skills to enable the clusters to record and share their projects.

Some of the key messages from the clusters included the importance of:

- continual professional dialogue
- talking about values explicitly
- implementing values education within the school’s own context and needs
- making goals achievable and sustainable
- responding to the needs of the local community
- openly discussing values conflicts
- supportive leadership.

Dr Ron Tooth, from the Pullenvale cluster, Qld, gave a presentation on the outcomes to date of the Storythread as a Transformative Tool for Delivering Quality Values Education project. He focused on the ways that this cluster is building sustainable values communities. He discussed the difficulties experienced in the early stages of the project where teachers grappled with what teaching values actually meant. Dr Tooth said that it was not until teachers realised values education is about what it means to be “fully human” that they could enact, live and demonstrate the values with students in a meaningful way.

Dr Tooth explained how the Pullenvale cluster is working together to demonstrate respect and care towards others and self through action and not just in theory. He discussed the importance of teachers keeping reflective journals, meeting regularly and developing (with the full support of the leadership team) a research model based on the “teacher as researcher”.

Professor Terence Lovat, Newcastle University, presented a discussion on resistance and resisters to values education. He questioned why there was resistance by some teachers and some schools to even questioning the values that the school stands for. Professor Lovat stressed the importance of not shying away from open values discussions in schools, especially if the values were contentious and disputed. He also stated that discussing values tensions and conflicts was vital in working towards a resolution of these issues.

Rita McIver and David Fox, Griffith cluster NSW, grappling with case writing at the briefing session.
As one participant said, “This briefing was connected, highly engaging and gave me loads to think about and I have come to a deeper understanding of the direction I want to take the cluster in…”

**Connecting to values education at the local level**

The Values Education Networks of Engagement (VENE) provide a wonderful opportunity for all school communities to contribute to, participate in and learn about the cluster projects of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2 (VEGPSP-2).

VENE meetings facilitated by Curriculum Corporation bring together teachers, mentors, academics, parents and representatives from the State, Territory, Catholic and independent sectors to build a professional learning community that supports the effective implementation of values education based on local needs.

Three VENE meetings are to be held in each State and Territory over the life of VEGPSP-2. The first round of meetings was an introduction to the cluster projects, covering the purpose of the project, the outcomes being achieved, the obstacles being experienced and what the clusters have learnt to date.

The variety of approaches being taken by the clusters in implementing the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools*, and the importance of taking small steps to achieve sustainable goals, stimulated great discussion at the meetings. One teacher said, “I didn’t realise that there could be so many different ways of doing values education. I’ve got so many ideas to try out!” Approaches varied widely and included implementing whole-school change to promote a positive values education ethos, KLA-based initiatives, a focus on particular values, community interaction, and pedagogical approaches based on the *Nine Values For Australian Schooling*.

Representatives from parent organisations found it invaluable to meet the teachers involved in the projects. It made the projects more “real” for them and provided a deeper understanding of “what’s going on in schools”.

Each of the VENES is responding to local needs in its own way. In Queensland, members are concerned to come to a fuller and deeper understanding of the pedagogical implications of values education. In Victoria, sustaining values education through professional development was a focus. In Western Australia, there was much discussion about showcasing the work of schools to a wider audience. It is envisaged that the VENES will help build a network of school communities (from cluster and non-cluster schools) from the ground up to support each other in developing values education applicable to their community.

For more information about your local VENE, call Leanne Compton or Barbara Bereznicki on 03 9207 9600.

Lynne Moten (Edmund Rice Ministries cluster) and Anne Bliss, Australian Parents Council/Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities, South Australia at the South Australian VENE.

Mary Hudson, South Australian Values Education Contact Officer, and Brenton Robins, Principal, Victor Harbour Primary School in the Cross Borders (NT, SA, WA) cluster.
The student voice in values education

Faith is a Year 3 student at Hilltop Road Primary School in Western Sydney, NSW.

On July 17 2007, a number of schools in the area held a professional development day on values education. A number of students presented speeches to the 220 teachers who participated.

Each student was given a question to focus on. Faith’s question was: “Why is it important that teachers and students show good values?”

This is her response:

“We know it’s not all the time, but there are situations when teachers and students don’t get along and sometimes show poor values. This affects our learning because the teacher spends time with those that misbehave, and they may get angry.

We’re not having a go at you, but sometimes teachers are impatient with slow learners, sometimes they don’t listen to us, and sometimes they are in a bad mood or stressed. This is either because we have put them in a bad mood, are angry or stressed, they are snappy, they treat us unfairly, they are less patient or they are unorganised, which some students take as lazy.

We don’t appreciate when teachers put us on detention for no reason or when the wrong person gets put in detention. We think this can be fixed by students being honest and telling the truth and teachers listening to both sides of the story. We like it when teachers are in a good mood.

When teachers are in a good mood and they are relaxed, they get along better with us, learning is more fun and we enjoy coming to school. These are the teachers we respect and like because they care about us and our education.”
Focus on: The Townsville cluster, Qld

Connecting young people to special elders in their lives in Townsville

The COME HOME: Breathing House Exhibition was a whole-school community arts-based project about building student resilience, social responsibility and wellbeing, and connecting to the community of Townsville and the diverse groups within it.

Three schools participated in this project: Townsville Central State School, an inner-city school with students from diverse cultural backgrounds; Garbutt State School, an inner-city school with a large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and Stuart State School, a small rural school. These schools are within 10km of each other.

The project aimed to develop a sense of self and connectedness for the students to assist them in managing their lives positively and safely while being involved in and supported by their community. Most importantly, it was about children connecting to their elders in a meaningful way.

Over eight weeks in Term 2, a team of eight artists from the local arts community and interstate worked with the children and other local and interstate artists to transform a mid-suburban house into a community wonderland representing the relations of young people to special elders in their lives. As well as ceramics and poster-painting, snippets of interviews with the young participants were formed into an interactive sound installation. The house was open to the whole community from 19-23 July.

Mr Anthony Ryan, Principal of Townsville Central State School, said that it was one of the “most significant projects the community has worked on, in that it changed peoples’ lives.” One of the main themes for the project identified by Mr Ryan was that if students “discover where they come from, they’ll find where they are going.” Mr Ryan also said that “not only were community bonds strengthened, but in some cases family bonds were made stronger as kids investigated their pasts … This can only be positive for student development.”

Stories from the VEGPSP-2 clusters

Violet Elizabeth Slip’s jewellery box passed from daughter to daughter over three generations.
News from the states and territories

Queensland

Values @Sunset Seminars
Brisbane – 1 November 2007
Rockhampton – February 2008
Townsville – March 2008

Speaker is Barbara Holland, from University of Western Sydney, recently from the US. The focus of this series is on using service-learning as a vehicle for implementing values education.

Service-Learning Forum
Brisbane North and Brisbane Central West Districts
27 November 2007

Keynote speakers: Professor Terry Lovat from Newcastle University and Kevin Kescke, Director Academic Studies, Portland State University, US.

Values Forum – “Values - the Moreton Way: Valuing Diversity in our Communities”
Moreton Region – 28 November 2007

Keynote speakers: Professor Terry Lovat from Newcastle University and Kevin Kescke, Director Academic Studies, Portland State University US.

One-day values education Workshop
Mackay/Whitsunday Region.
More information available at http://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/values/ on wellbeing. In light of these observations, students designed values postcards to illustrate their observations in terms of the values of honesty, care, respect, excellence and responsibility.

The postcards are used by teachers on a daily basis to name, reinforce and honour situations when students demonstrate these values. When a child actively demonstrates a value, a postcard is posted to the family outlining how their child has displayed positive values.

South Australia

Postcards from South Australia
Yankalilla Area School and Rapid Bay Primary School are exploring one overriding question in their whole-school approach to values education: Will the wellbeing of staff and students be improved by bringing to life school values with an explicit, visible focus?

Students are actively engaged in collecting evidence to answer this question. They have completed observation grids to record behaviours that positively and negatively impact wellbeing. In light of these observations, students designed values postcards to illustrate their observations in terms of the values of honesty, care, respect, excellence and responsibility.

The postcards are used by teachers on a daily basis to name, reinforce and honour situations when students demonstrate these values. When a child actively demonstrates a value, a postcard is posted to the family outlining how their child has displayed positive values.

Care postcards from Yankalilla Primary School.
Connecting young and old at Undera Primary School values education forum

Relationship-building can be very important to small communities. However, without a designated purpose, people can hesitate to discuss personal beliefs or experiences.

Undera is a small rural community, northwest of Shepparton.

The Values Forum complemented an existing Garden Science Project at Undera Primary School centred on students growing vegetables with assistance in their specially developed garden.

The school holds grandparent events where grandparents work in the garden with the students. This has been a great way to foster relationships between students and older members of our community. The informal discussions that were part of these interactions encouraged thinking about values. This included topics such as, “What does it mean to be a good person”, “Dealing with hardships in a rural environment (then and now)”, “Good times and bad times (then and now)”. Plenty of humour also made it into the discussions, with tall tales of fishing trips and snakes.

The forum allowed the sharing of wonderful stories and positive discussion which may not have otherwise happened. Everyone in the community has lived through major droughts in the past. They know the way drought can erode self-confidence and self-esteem in rural people. They can show the way, in terms of resilience, through authentic stories and empathy. They may not realise the powerful impact that a conversation between a 10-year-old and a 70-year-old can have.

Since the forum, there has been ongoing discussion and reflection on what a “Good Member of the Undera Community” is and how students can be a good member of the community by acting in certain ways.

Dave Farrell
Principal

DEST commissions new values education research

DEST has commissioned the University of Newcastle to undertake a project titled Testing and Measuring the Impact of Values Education on Quality Teaching to provide additional research on the effectiveness of values education in Australian schools.

A team led by Professor Terry Lovat and Dr Ron Toomey will examine whether the effects of explicit values education can be measured, going beyond claims of anecdotal evidence to demonstrate the impact and outcomes of values education.

Using a range of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, the project intends to find out whether there is empirical evidence to support the claim that “values education increases student academic diligence, improves school coherence, classroom ambience, student-teacher relationships, student wellbeing, teacher wellbeing and increases parental participation.”

The project will be conducted over a 20-month period between March 2007 and December 2008, when the team will report to the Australian Government.
On the national scene

National Partnership Projects updates

Peak parent, principal and teacher educator organisations continue to support the Values Education Programme through a variety of initiatives.

- The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) and the Australian Parents Council are producing leaflets for parents and ACSSO has a values education page on its website at: http://www.valuesineducation.org.au. ACSSO is holding its annual conference for all key stakeholders in education in Darwin on 22–23 October 2007.

- The Australian Joint Council of Professional Teacher Associations (AJCPTA) has held a national symposium. This symposium was an opportunity for various members of AJCPTA and the affiliated teacher associations to discuss and plan for the next year’s values education outcomes in each State and Territory.

- The Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council has developed a page on their website devoted to values education and is producing a series of electronic and hard copy newsletters for principals.

- The Australian Council of Deans of Education is currently conducting its third round of forums across 17 universities to inform teacher educators in each State and Territory about the latest developments in values education. Teacher educators have been exploring the link between values education and quality teaching.

- As part of its commissioned research project in values education, the University of Newcastle has conducted explicit surveys of teachers and principals in the Wallsend Cluster of Schools in order to inform their work on classroom ambience.