

SA Alliance of Schools cluster, South Australia

Cluster coordinator: Lina Scalfino, Modbury School – Preschool to Year 7

Participating schools:

- Modbury School – Preschool to Year 7
- Para Vista Preschool – 7
- Penola Primary School
- St Augustine’s Parish School
- St Columba College
- Salisbury High School

UAN critical friend: Professor Colin MacMullin, Flinders University, SA

The government and non-government schools comprising the SA Alliance of Schools Cluster have a long involvement in values education, in some cases extending to more than a decade. Schools within the cluster have, to use their own words, ‘explored the values of their own communities and grappled with the relationship between quality teaching (and leadership) and the enhancement of these values within their own sites’. Some of the initiatives undertaken by schools in this context include the Living Values programme, teaching philosophy, whole school work with Programme Achieve, new approaches to pastoral care, and a values orientation to behaviour management.

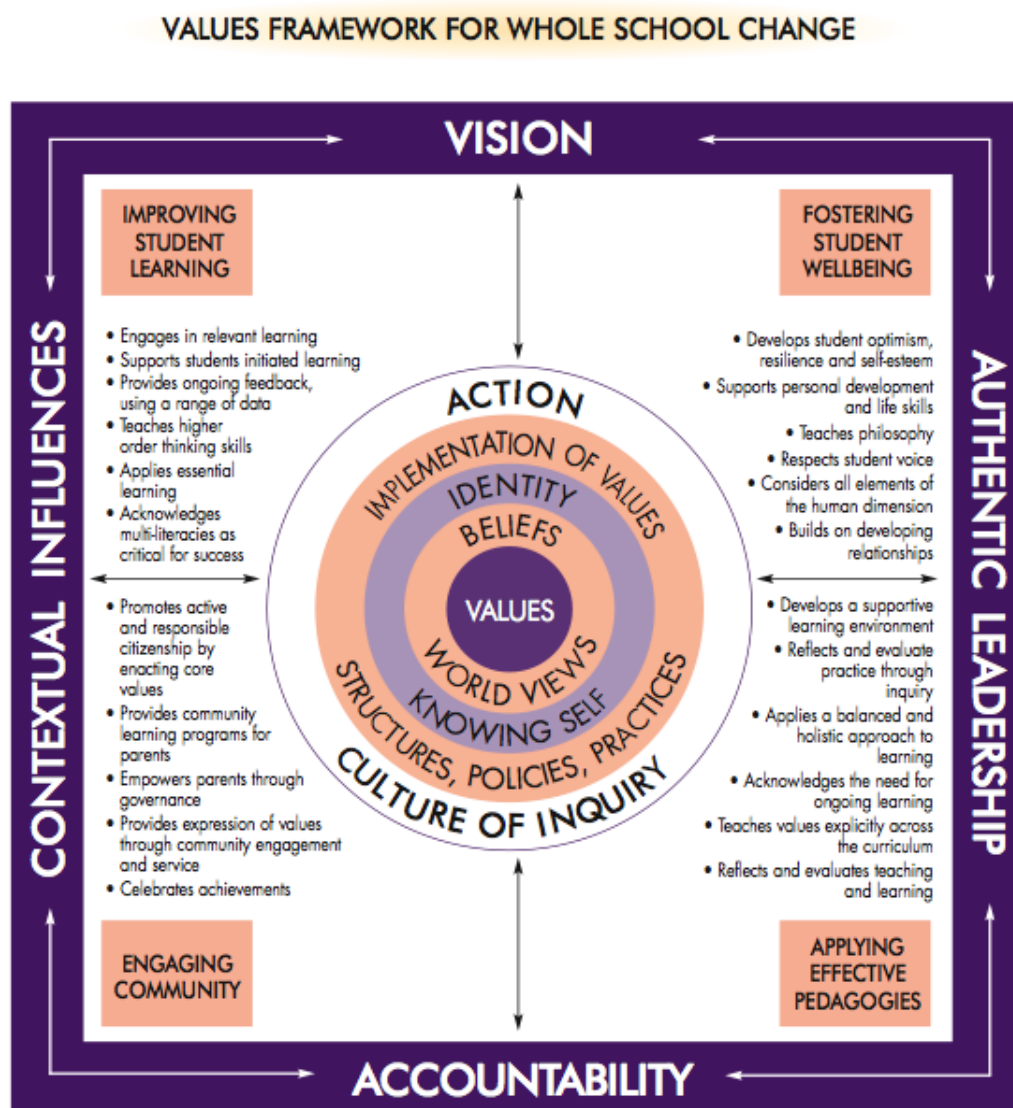
Despite all these endeavours, however, it still has been the case that there is resistance to overcome. At the lead school, for instance, there was a fair amount of ‘initial reluctance’ from staff to being involved. This was wrapped up in concerns about heavy workloads and a lack of familiarity with the methodology proposed. Tackling and overcoming this required a range of activities, supported by the university associate for the cluster, including:

- professional development on action research;
- encouraging staff to see the action research they already undertake as part of their teaching and explaining it really was just ‘a method of actually recording what they did’ which can make ‘a huge impact on learning outcomes and pedagogical practices’;
- releasing staff for a 50-minute session to formalise their individual action research;
- perhaps most importantly of all, reassuring staff that their reflective journals were for their eyes alone, to remove any perceived threat.

With a more positive atmosphere in place, cluster schools then were able to pursue their own specific activities under the common cluster aim of exploring ‘the connections between values education, resilience, higher order thinking, social skilfulness and responsible citizenship’. In doing so, they all adopted a common model of whole school change developed by the cluster lead school, which starts with values at its core and then ripples out to look at beliefs and world views as a prelude to working on structures, policies and practices related to improving student learning, student wellbeing, strengthening community and effective pedagogy.

This whole school change model illustrated in Figure 18 is, of course, a good example of the overlap that exists between the categories adopted for classifying clusters in this report. Though pedagogy clearly was a major focus within the cluster (and particularly in the cluster lead school as illustrated below), and central to the activities of some of its schools, it by no means was in all, and in some cases may not even have been right up the front.

Figure 18: Modbury values framework for whole school change



In one cluster R–12 college for instance, where secondary enrolments had grown markedly in recent years, the opportunity for discussion and cohesion had lessened in that time and the school felt a need for inconsistencies about values to be addressed, particularly since this manifested itself in significantly different approaches to key values and behaviours among staff. The school simply needed to have values as a high priority so they are lived and modelled each day.

Thus, in consultation with its university associate, it developed a process ‘where all staff had an agreed position on what values were crucial, what these looked like, felt like and [how they] were lived out in the College before we could work closely with our students in values education’. One interesting technique adopted in this context was to get staff in January to list on a sheet of paper three actions they would try to undertake to live out the values of Respect, Love of Learning and Success. This sheet was then sealed in an envelope that only was opened in March when staff were invited to reflect on how they had gone against the aims they had set.

Apart from anything else, the school describes how the whole process has reinforced the importance of these three values in its overall teaching and learning approach, with individual staff noting, as two typically put it, that they now 'keep values in mind, even in the hurly burly of everyday teaching', and keep them 'as a priority when planning units'.

That said time, as in almost all of the cluster reports, emerged as a problem in the minds of staff, with teachers commonly noting 'more time needed in learning teams' or a desire for 'more opportunities for staff ... for PD conversations'. Partly in response the school has reined in its objectives and adopted a longer-term view.

We set out with ambitious plans thinking we could work with the staff, educate our students and our parents in the understanding and application of values. Hoping for higher order thinking by our students to act from a values position rather than acting appropriately because of the consequences of not. As the project developed, the variety of demands on staff and the College made it obvious we should be realistic and set achievable and measurable outcomes. The project implementation now has at least a two to three year implementation.

Time did not, however, preclude substantial activity taking place. Individual school action undertaken within the cluster as part of the project included:

- training and other professional development on action research, values unit planning and teaching;
- action research at the class level;
- empirical research to measure the impact of teaching philosophy on students' capacity to think ethically;
- alignment of values education initiatives to other policies and practices such as behaviour management and programmes such as Programme Achieve;
- examinations of how values are lived within the school community;
- surveys of staff and the wider school community to prioritise values within the school;
- particular teaching and learning programmes to foster values within the school such as a unit exploring the cultures and languages of students in the school as part of a focus on Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion.

And the combination of these sorts of activities has, in only a short time, yielded significant results. One activity undertaken by the schools was to analyse their achievements against Lovat's (2005)¹ suggestion that quality teaching involves a mix of intellectual depth, communicative capacity, capacity to reflect and capacity for self-management and self-knowledge, with a snapshot of the outcomes included in Table 8.

¹ Lovat, T 2000, *Values Education and Teachers' Work: A Quality Teaching Perspective* (available from <http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/default.asp?id=8884>)

Table 8: Modbury cluster achievements against Lovat framework

Children	Teachers
<i>Intellectual depth</i>	
<p>Children have deeper understanding of the construct of values or morals.</p> <p>Children have a greater understanding of the particular values emphasised by their own schools.</p>	<p>Teachers have a deeper understanding of children's learning and the basis of 'constructivist teaching'.</p> <p>Teachers have developed deeper understanding of the notion of values and ways in which values education can be integrated across the curriculum and linked to school community events.</p>
<i>Communicative capacity</i>	
<p>Children are more willing to share their thoughts with others.</p> <p>Children have an increased vocabulary for talking about issues, values, needs, and behaviours.</p> <p>Children are talking more about values in normal conversation.</p>	<p>Teachers are listening to students more and seeking their opinions.</p> <p>Teachers more often are reflecting with others on what is working and not in the school and planning for change.</p> <p>Teachers report they are treating students with greater respect.</p>
<i>Capacity to reflect</i>	
<p>Children appear to be more reflective in their actions.</p> <p>Children use a guided, reflective procedure to think about their behaviour and to plan actions to restore relationships after conflict.</p>	<p>Through action research, teachers have developed their capacities to reflect on their own practice.</p> <p>Staff are now better able to reflect upon values and connect them to the curriculum.</p>
<i>Self-management</i>	
<p>Children are more able to manage their own behaviour.</p> <p>Teachers note children are more able to work independently.</p>	<p>Teachers are more able to manage student behaviour issues on their own through the use of restorative practices.</p>
<i>Self-knowledge</i>	
<p>Children appear to have greater understanding of the choices available to them and the range of actions they could take.</p>	<p>Teachers are more aware of their own behaviour and how they serve as role models for students.</p>

Improving pedagogy, which is richly represented in the table above, was, as foreshadowed earlier, arguably most evident in the activities of the cluster lead school. Consistent with the cluster aim to 'develop our students as ethical thinkers, resilient individuals, socially skilful people and responsible citizens through values-driven pedagogical practices', this school focused on four interrelated tasks.

First, it sought to introduce 'Philosophy for children' and develop a community of inquiry throughout the school. In particular, this has meant teaching ethical reasoning whereby students explore situations where ethical decisions need to be made. For example, if you know your best friend is regularly taking drugs, should you stay quiet or confide in someone who may be able to help?

Second, the school introduced action research for staff involving self-reflection about values education and the pedagogy that supports this in their classrooms. Some of the research projects being pursued, in teachers' own words, include the following:

- *Through the exploration of human experiences in times of disaster, I hope the students will develop understanding of compassion and resilience.*
- *Through the explicit teaching of listening, speaking and thinking skills, will the students develop a clearer understanding of interdependence?*
- *Will a balance in the teaching of creative and critical thinking impact positively on the development of students caring and being compassionate thinkers?*

Third, it worked to ensure a connection between the teaching of values and a personal commitment to living these values in the actions individuals take. This primarily has taken the form of particular activities that demonstrate the enactment of values espoused, such as learning about poverty and deciding what needs to be done to support this and visiting elderly citizens' homes to develop feelings of Compassion, Care and Respect. This focus on congruence between words and deeds arguably is even more evident in another cluster primary school where the values of Trust and Honesty are constantly developed through practice in the school.

... we do not lock classrooms during breaks, neither are the resource centre or computer suite locked. Students can have access if required. The computer suite is used with supervision three days per week. Outside of these times, the children honour the expectation that you don't go in the room at breaks, unless moving through for another purpose. Equally, student monitors take canteen orders into the canteen unsupervised. There is easy access to chips, freezer items, etc and yet despite this, we have found theft is not an issue. Similarly any student able to see the dials of the photocopier can use it for a legitimate purpose without direct supervision. Students are given lessons either by other children or staff so they can use the photocopier when required. A side bonus of this trust is the countless hours of School Service Officers' time saved.

By 'giving' children a level of trust which they can live up to, we are teaching the very essence of the values desired. Conversely, we cannot expect to teach the values of trust and honesty if we take away any opportunity that children have to learn and demonstrate these values.

And finally, the cluster lead school continued to develop its values culture with a particular focus on the integration of values across the curriculum supported by an appropriate values-based pedagogical approach. This particularly has involved efforts to understand and employ what the principal refers to as the 'constructivist principles of ... 1) student voice; 2) engagement; 3) learning that is relevant and connected and has meaning for the learner; 4) learning that is constructed with a process orientation not only content driven; 5) learning is socially constructed, therefore the building of relationships is critical; 6) the development of a supportive, yet challenging learning environment stimulates learning and engagement'.

The whole approach, it should be noted, is underpinned by the introduction in 2006 of learning teams that explore a common issue which impacts on teaching and learning in a way that 'drills down into effective values pedagogy in the school'. This could, the school notes, require further reading, visiting schools, trying out new things in the classroom and then reporting to the team and sharing what has been learned. This link between values education and the broader learning teams illustrates the school's belief that 'values are not an add on, nor is it a project or fad. What is emerging is that values education does affect all areas of the school's operations, practices, policies and pedagogy'.

The evident focus on teacher learning and professional development is not limited in this cluster to the lead school.

At one of the cluster high schools, for instance, the desire to help students understand and enact particular values meant starting with the staff. 'A superficial approach to values education often meant that staff reverted to a power over, win/ lose model of "managing" students. Hence at times in our early stages of values education we witnessed teachers yelling at students about the importance of respect.'

The school therefore initiated 'many conversations and meetings' on how it goes about 'deeply embedding our values into our practices and therefore have better relationships in the classrooms, more effective engagement in learning and less student behaviour management issues'.

A wide range of activities ensued which revealed a need to focus in particular on the value of Respect. One particularly interesting technique used with staff and students alike in this context was a problem-solving cycle of activity based on hunches and hypotheses on which subsequent action can be based. More specifically, the technique involves the following steps.

Step 1: Identify the problem (in this case, building Respect).

Step 2: Describe hunches and hypotheses.

The aim here is to collaboratively identify five hunches/hypotheses to identify why Respect is a problem at the school. This was undertaken in small groups, who then brought together their lists to develop an agreed whole staff view.

Step 3: Interrelationship diagram, questions and data

Staff worked together to identify relationships between the top five hunches/ hypotheses they previously had identified. They then sought to break these five down into 'meaningful questions' they could analyse and identify data they needed to collect.

Step 4: Making connections

Work then was undertaken to identify each of the top five as either an effect and/or a root cause of the perceived problem in the school. By drawing arrows between the factors in the interrelationship diagram, and noting the number of arrows coming from each item on it, staff were able to distinguish between the real causal factors and their effects, and hence focus attention on dealing with the cause(s).

In this particular case, the root causes were seen as community and home values, consistency of consequences, low self-esteem and valuing disrespect/peer pressure, all of which produced a lack of acceptance of responsibility for one's own actions. This identification of the root causes in turn provided staff with the clues they needed to tackle the problem through a whole school approach.

One important manifestation of this in practice was the promotion of greater student voice to build Respect. A key strategy in this regard is the use of Student Action Teams to involve students more in the life of the school. As soon as students begin Year 8 they are given the opportunity to become involved in Student Action Teams (SATs) and trained by students in Year 9. Teams in 2005–6 have included a Year Book SAT, a Student Services SAT, a Lesson Breakers SAT, a Sports and Activities SAT and a Student Uniform Committee SAT.

Professional learning in a cluster parish school, by contrast, concentrated more on units and how they are taught. This school created a pro forma which staff filled out prior to teaching values-based units with time allocated in staff meetings for the necessary brainstorming and sharing of ideas to occur. More specifically, staff worked together in year level area groups to complete the forms, such as the summary sample on the topic of Integrity in Figure 19.

Figure 19: Sample teaching unit on Integrity

Brainstorming and defining integrity: Y charts (how it looks, sounds and feels); Braindrops and PMIs (plus points, minus points and interesting points) were used to help children capture the essence of integrity.

Children worked in groups with a range of resources to find a newspaper article demonstrating integrity, which they then shared and discussed.

Bible links: Students were challenged to find examples of Jesus conducting himself with integrity and specific Bible stories were chosen where integrity was a key theme.

Exploring relationships between our school emblem and what integrity is.

Relating integrity to being honest and true to ourselves.

Brainstorming a list of right things to do and wrong things to do in relation to their lives at home and at school. Students in small groups brainstormed a list of consequences for these actions.

Teachers used role-plays, especially against peer pressure in the yard.

Students completed integrity displays/mobiles for their rooms.

Small groups/classes discussed whether it was always easy to choose to do the right thing and devised their own definition of integrity.

Whenever stories with a moral were shared, questioning centred on the implications of behaviour of characters in the story.

We looked at the role of Community Service Organisations and made links to helping others in need as examples of acting with integrity.

Discussions were initiated in class meetings on respecting opinions and accepting all contributions on the issue.

Students brainstormed other key words that come under the heading of integrity and developed a graphic organiser of their choices.

The Year 6 students planned a mass around the theme of integrity.

In this and all the other activity that occurred, it should be noted, the cluster found the National Framework to be a 'helpful resource'.

All of the schools in the cluster reported that the National Framework was helpful to their efforts to advance values education in their schools. Although each school had its own list of values, each was able to integrate their values with those in the National Framework. Schools reported a strong sense of support from the Australian Government.

The other important lesson learned by the cluster in its efforts to improve its values-related pedagogical approach, was the need for clear leadership on the way. As the cluster's final report makes clear:

Values education involves change – teacher change and school change. It became clear during the life of this project that school leadership plays a pivotal role in achieving the goals of values education. Where the initiative was guided, or supported by the school's leadership team, significant growth occurred. In these schools, whole staffs were engaged. This resulted in major development of curriculum and pedagogy at the classroom level. These schools also engaged with their communities and, in so doing, demonstrated that values education does not reside within the boundaries of the school, in isolation from its community.

Key messages

1. Effective values education depends on consistency between the values espoused by the school and the values it enacts. And when schools are clear about the values that guide the actions they take, this has a flow-on effect to the school community as a whole.

2. Supportive school leaders play a critical role in mobilising students, parents and staff, and hence in achieving the values education goals of the school.
3. Values can and should be taught, and an effective means of teaching values is to address them in a constructivist pedagogical framework.
4. The degree of negativity coming from some staff can prove more of a challenge than any negative reaction from students in the school. The case studies and key messages outlined in this report, along with forums conducted as part of implementing the *National Framework on Values Education in Australian Schools*, provide means to engage teachers in dialogue that can help overcome some of the negative attitudes that exist. This in turn suggests that strategies to foster greater ownership of values education by staff need to be developed and implemented in schools at the same time as working to ensure they teach it well.