Values in Action: Building Resilience and Inclusion

Participating schools

- Davallia Primary School
- Glengarry Primary School
- Duncraig Primary School

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The project

The Reporting Values Cluster Values in Action: Building Resilience and Inclusion project was framed around reporting values to parents in accordance with the Western Australian Department of Education requirement that teachers report on ‘attitude’, ‘behaviour’ and ‘effort’. The WA report format includes a list of seventeen capability descriptors. The project aimed to review and make recommendations for amending that list; it also aimed to support teachers in making evidence-based, rather than subjective, judgements about student behaviours and attitudes.

This project specifically built on the ten principles of good practice in values education from the VEGPSP Stage 2 work. In particular, planning for project activities concentrated on developing a shared vocabulary, using values-focused pedagogies, and teachers implicitly and explicitly modelling and teaching values. A key element of the project was ‘the informed, sustained and targeted professional learning and professional collaborations’, implemented by regular mentoring and coaching from the cluster leaders. Teachers were encouraged to take risks and be innovative; and also to monitor and record what was happening throughout the project so that quantitative data could be collected for evaluation.

The three government primary schools involved in the project are geographically and demographically proximate. They are in an upper socioeconomic, predominantly white anglo-saxon area of Perth. Parents are aspirational with a strong focus on academic outcomes. Many children from these primary schools transition into the independent sector for the last years of primary school and a high proportion of the cohort moves into independent schools for high school. Parental involvement in the schools has generally been limited to parent–teacher meetings, school council, and support projects such as building works. It is uncommon for parents to engage with the school in delivering curriculum. There was an assumption that the values of home and school were similar and that values education was not a separate topic for discussion at school. A significant change resulting from the VASP was the sense of increased connection and collaboration between home and school. As one teacher put it:

*The most significant impact this project has had on me, I think, has been developing a feeling of being part of a community...I’m an experienced teacher and I feel I’ve got a lot to offer, but where do you fit in, in a school where everything seems to be humming along very nicely...I think with us*
all going through this, working out what is values, whose values are we teaching, what are community values, what are the school values, what are home values, where does all of this fit in, in going through that process with the parents, students and teachers, I think that for myself, I’ve developed a sense of where I’m at with this school, with the school that I currently work in, and where this sense of community comes from, and it comes from talking about things that are really important to each other, and that’s about being human, and the parents are as interested in this as what the teachers are. And we have found common ground through the project that’s helped us set the ground work for where we are going to be going in the future and I’m very, very excited about that.

The project set about developing a common values language. The Cluster Coordinator was an experienced values educator who ran professional learning workshops for teachers across two of the schools, while the Deputy Coordinator did the same in her own school. This professional development was intended to build cohesion for the teachers to work as a team as well as building their confidence to explicitly teach values education. Two participating teachers were invited from each school site to provide professional partnerships. The Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator acted as mentors and coaches in this process. Cohort teachers developed criteria for assessment with students to make links with their knowledge about values during the first stage and collected and analysed the resulting data for the project. One site implemented student values diaries as part of the project data collection.

Once teachers and students had experienced the process of developing a rubric with assessment criteria for values and developed some confidence, parents were then invited to join the project to be a part of the process for the next rubric. Parents developed an awareness of the values work being done in class with their children by working with teachers and students at the school. The school leadership at each site was also encouraged to participate.

The cluster was very focused on bringing parents into the core of the values education work. A regular values education newsletter was disseminated through the schools and a parent survey was forwarded to parents for their responses. The focus of the project remained the explicit teaching of values as a process of engagement and reflection set in authentic activities. Teachers were encouraged to be innovative and have ‘courageous conversations’ with students and parents. Cohort teachers shifted in their thinking about values education from ‘pencil and paper’ assessment activities to a more holistic approach embedded in curriculum and developing parents as partners in the process. The involvement of parents across three schools in this way would not have been likely without VASP funding.

In addition to parent and teacher meetings, the project held a number of events outside the classroom which were designed to engage students in the exploration of values and model to parents the complexity of issues when addressing values education. The activities led to both students and parents becoming deeply aware of values language, attitudes and behaviours. One student noted:

I think that before the values project came to our school, we weren’t really practising them that much...it’s really made it a lot easier for people to practise our values and it’s important because we can use them in the real world...for one thing it taught me how to make friends, and also have your good audience and make sure everyone gets a fair share at whatever we’re doing.

A parent summed up her experience as follows:

When I think about the journey that we have gone on, as a parent body and as a school community... I think the most significant change for me...is that the [VASP cluster project] has given us a more concrete tool I suppose to discuss and develop
values within our family. Although as parents I think we incidentally and implicitly talk about values as situations arise, and I know that the teachers have spoken about that happening in the classroom...the values project has given my children and my husband and I some more concrete language as a tool to discuss around the dinner table, what values are, what it is to be a kind and respectful member of our family and our community. And the major moment for me was watching my son...during the heroes activity, because I have to be honest, prior to that when he would tell me around the dinner table, you know, we all talk about what we did in our day, he would kind of roll his eyes and go '[the teacher] did values, more values stuff today'. And really he found that very difficult to grasp. I think it was very airy fairy and intangible for him, but we...came to the heroes project, and it was concrete for him and he could clearly identify the characteristics of his hero, why they were important, what they meant to him, and it really was a light bulb switching on for him. Which in turn made it extremely rewarding for me.

While each site implemented the approach to values education differently, all three schools maintained a commitment to the work beyond the formal life of the project. One significant contributing factor to this was the unanticipated positive response from parents across the three schools. Initially parents were not convinced that values education was the domain of school and they were sceptical about teaching values explicitly; however, by the end of the project as participants developed shared knowledge, skills and understandings, there was a significant shift in the perception that values education is the sole domain of parents.

Key outcomes

- Teachers reported that the collaborative experiences of the project had deepened their understanding about values education in their classrooms and they appreciated the time to engage and discuss.
- Students became more confident and articulate and took more responsibility for themselves and other students.
- Parent engagement with their school communities shifted and increased. Parents incorporated the school conversations at home where they encouraged debate and discussion about values.
- Students were deeply affected: their understanding of tolerance, respect, care and compassion became embedded in actions and reflection.