Inclusive School Practices Toolkit

Values Pedagogy Leading to Inclusive School Communities

This tool has been developed as part of the *Inclusive School Communities Project*, funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency. The project is led by JFA Purple Orange.

## Introduction

Research has demonstrated improved learning when holistic development is the target outcome rather than focusing exclusively on content, technique and measurable outcomes.[[1]](#footnote-1) Volumes of empirical evidence and conceptual analysis from across the globe show ‘values’ are inextricably linked to good practice pedagogy that facilitates student’s achievement and transforms their life chances.[[2]](#footnote-2) These ideas align with the aim of inclusive education “to ensure that all children and young people experience an education that enhances their learning and social relationships, and prepares them for a quality adult life in the community”[[3]](#footnote-3) and therefore this is useful information for schools to know about.

This tool outlines the research on values pedagogy in schools and explores its relevance to developing inclusive school communities. School staff are encouraged to use this tool to expand their understanding of values education and the various ways it can be applied in classrooms, schools, and communities to support the holistic development of all students in an inclusive education setting.

## Ideas

In June 2019, five South Australian schools gathered as a Community-of-Practice (CoP) to explore a range of elements relating to inclusive school communities. This included discussing the ‘Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians’[[4]](#footnote-4) (Melbourne Declaration), which was under review at the time. The school delegates involved in this discussion raised the need for a shift from content knowledge to a capabilities-focused curriculum that instils in students the ability to learn and focuses on self-efficacy. The message from these SA schools was clear:

*School education should give attention to the ‘whole student’ and not just academic achievement and employment readiness; it should be values-based and consider different learning dispositions and general capabilities.*

Schools need to develop young people who are not only highly literate, numerate, able to problem-solve, and communicate effectively[[5]](#footnote-5) but who are also able to build social and personal capital including interpersonal skills, think and act ethically, and form positive relationships. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) at their meeting in 2002 “acknowledged that education is as much about building character as it is about equipping students with specific skill”.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Values

Values are defined as “the principles that help you to decide what is right and wrong, and how to act in various situations”[[7]](#footnote-7). Values are inextricably tied to beliefs, attitudes and behaviours and extensive research in the social sciences has documented this relationship. In childhood and adolescence, peers and school are central to shaping our values and beliefs as we explore, discover and form our identities. Arguably then, values are an essential component of a quality education that prepares young people for personal and social responsibilities and equips them to contribute meaningfully to society.

Values Education

Values education is a process of teaching and learning about the ideals that a society deems important[[8]](#footnote-8). These ideals are socially constructed and time and location specific. The goal of values education is for students to understand the values but also reflect them in their attitudes and behaviour and contribute to society through ethical conduct and civic participation[[9]](#footnote-9). Attitudes and behaviours considered appropriate and morally acceptable can be developed, at least in part, from a range of pedagogies that include critical reflection on issues relating to values[[10]](#footnote-10). MCEETYA “noted that values based education can strengthen students’ self-esteem, optimism and commitment to personal fulfilment; and help students exercise ethical judgement and social responsibility”.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Research on Values Education in Schools

Values education has been a growing movement in the United States and Australia over the last decade. Studies have described various character education programs in US schools that aimed to teach important values such as friendship, fairness and social justice[[12]](#footnote-12), and respect, responsibility and trustworthiness[[13]](#footnote-13). These studies reported character and moral education were found to positively influence student attitudes and behaviour[[14]](#footnote-14).

The ‘National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools’ (National Framework), developed from the ‘Values Education Study 2003’ and national consultation of the Draft Framework, was agreed to and endorsed by all the state and territory Ministers of Education in 2005[[15]](#footnote-15). After its release, three rounds of school cluster projects for values education were funded by the Australian Government: the ‘Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stages 1 and 2’ (2005-2008) and the ‘Values in Action Schools Project’ (2008-2009)[[16]](#footnote-16). These projects investigated how values education can have positive, constructive influences on pedagogy, teacher–student relationships, and student wellbeing and social cohesion[[17]](#footnote-17). The findings provide guidance to all Australian schools on using good practice values education outcomes for the long-term benefit of the whole school community. These projects made the link between explicit teaching of values and developing “student awareness and positive behaviours for a socially inclusive community.”[[18]](#footnote-18) Additionally, there appears to be recognition in the Australian Curriculum of a need for values education to underpin learning about various concepts and assist in development of decision-making capacities[[19]](#footnote-19).

## Actions

The following information has been adapted from an article by John DeNobile and Erin Hogan in the Curriculum and Leadership Journal[[20]](#footnote-20). School leaders and staff are encouraged to reflect on whether values education is already operating in or can be adopted by their school. These reflection and discussion questions may be helpful:

1. What values educational activities have been run at the school in the past and what was the impact?
2. What values educational activities are being run at the school currently and what are the results so far?
3. How can values education contribute towards the school’s vision and framework?
4. What opportunities for values education exist at the classroom, school and community levels and what is the goal?[[21]](#footnote-21)

Values education may be seen on three levels: classroom, school and community, which interact with one another.

Alongside the above reflection and discussion questions, schools may find it helpful to review the following examples of values education:

The Classroom Level

Students engage in a variety of activities in class designed to introduce them to certain values and ideals that society deems important[[22]](#footnote-22). The activities enable students to explore and understand how these values apply to everyday life in and out of school.

For example:

* Discussions based on moral dilemmas
* Philosophical activities such as Socratic Circles
* Analysis of media and communication to reveal underlying value messages[[23]](#footnote-23)

Explicit values education curriculum and related pedagogy may include lessons that explore a value in terms of its meaning, its relative importance to different people and how it might be enacted in day-to-day life using values analysis; a strategy consistent with critical pedagogy through the processes of reflection and evaluation involved[[24]](#footnote-24).

In the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project[[25]](#footnote-25), a classroom teacher used the New South Wales core values (integrity, excellence, respect, responsibility, cooperation, participation, care, fairness, democracy)[[26]](#footnote-26) to set up her class rules for the year. The teacher used the following method:

1. first few weeks of the year explored these core values with the class, using some explicit teaching as well as children’s literature
2. co-constructed a set of class rules based on these values
3. placed signs around the room such as ‘We respect one another’, ‘We act responsibly’ and ‘We cooperate’ to remind students of their co-constructed rules

The values-based classroom rules provided a code of ethics for the students to live by and perhaps develop morally.

The School Level

Values are taught directly and indirectly as a result of school history, background or religious affiliation and this is interwoven into the curriculum and pedagogy at the classroom level[[27]](#footnote-27). For example, the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) aims to transform the way people think, act and live in the world. The most marked manifestation of the IPP at St Aloysius’ College, a school for boys from years 3 to 12 in northern Sydney, is a strong commitment to service learning[[28]](#footnote-28). Service learning enables students to critically explore and enact values in a real-life setting[[29]](#footnote-29). All students at St Aloysius’ College are required to participate in service learning through activities ranging from fundraising for local charities to cultural immersions in developing countries. These initiatives are invaluable for developing young people who are thoughtful and respectful of the needs of others, and who embody values such as compassion, understanding and integrity.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The Community Level

Values are explored as a result of interaction with the wider community or other schools.[[31]](#footnote-31) Service learning is also an example of how values education works at both the school and community level. The Interschool Harmony Committee (IHC) comprises two Islamic schools, two Catholic schools and four state schools in southern Sydney which joined forces in 2003 to provide dynamic and engaging values education[[32]](#footnote-32). The IHC explored core values such as respect, understanding and inclusion through combined interschool activities and produced public drama performances and even a commercially published children’s book. In 2007 staff members from the IHC seven member schools participated in a professional development program about the various methodologies used in values education including discussion of moral dilemmas, values analysis and structured inquiry, and over the following six weeks these newly learned strategies were tested in their classrooms.[[33]](#footnote-33) Their work was presented at a follow-up professional development session, which this time included parents and other members of the community as a participative audience. This example demonstrates how values education can bring together people from different backgrounds and provide a setting to work on common goals.

Three factors have been identified as contributing to the success of values education activities:

1. Support from school leadership – the principal is actively involved in activities and encourages participation from staff, students and the wider community
2. Whole school approach
3. Links with the community – connecting activities to the real-world including students’ families and wider social networks[[34]](#footnote-34)

## Schools are encouraged to use this tool as a starting point for learning about values education and then exploring how embedding values at the classroom, school and community levels in ways that are relevant, engaging and meaningful can lead to inclusive school communities.

## More Information

Article on what, how, why and what next of values education by John DeNobile and Erin Hogan in the Curriculum and Leadership Journal http://www.curriculum.edu.au/leader/values\_education\_what,\_how,\_why\_\_what\_next,36873.html?issueID=12833

Information about the three Values Education school cluster projects including the final reports and case studies http://www.curriculum.edu.au/values/val\_about\_values\_clusters\_projects,8876.html

Lesson plans and activities with a values focus - part of the Values for Australian Schooling resource series to support schools in implementing the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools. http://www.curriculum.edu.au/values/val\_lesson\_plans\_and\_activities,15648.html

National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/\_resources/Framework\_PDF\_version\_for\_the\_web.pdf and Values for Australian Schooling http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/\_resources/9\_point\_values\_with\_flag\_only.pdf

The Six Kinds of Best is a formula to help young people be the best they can be. Teachers use the Six Kinds of Best in their classrooms, parents teach them at home and many schools have adopted them as their whole school values. http://www.sixkindsofbest.com/index.php/about-us

## Acknowledgement

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