

Sabbatical Leave Report

Virtues- 'The Gifts of Character'

He whakamaoritanga na Tawai Hauraki-Te Rangi. He taonga aroha mo nga mokopuna mo apopo

Why the Virtues Project?

The Virtues Project began in Canada in 1991 and because of its simplicity and effectiveness, is now being applied in over 60 countries. Originally designed to support and promote healthy family life and to combat rising violence it is now used in schools, indigenous communities, adolescent suicide prevention programmes, drug and alcohol and prison rehabilitation programmes. Virtues Education is used in private businesses and government organisations to enhance corporate spirit and team building. It has been honoured as a model programme for healthy families at the World Conference of Cities, in association with the UN Secretariat during the International Year of the Family.

The Vision of The Virtues Project is to serve humanity by supporting the moral and spiritual development of people of all cultures, by helping them to remember who they really are and to live by their highest values. The Mission of The Virtues Project is to provide empowering strategies that inspire the practice of virtues in everyday life through programmes of excellence and simplicity which support people of all ages to cultivate their virtues -- the gifts of character.

Virtues Education in Schools is an easy way to bring out the best in children and ourselves. It uses five strategies of the Virtues Project as a framework for positive change and it can be integrated into the curriculum and discipline system - students learn in the context of everyday interactions. This programme builds character by encouraging people to be responsible for their actions by practising honesty, respect, tolerance, cooperation, etc.

We reviewed our Pupil Behaviour Management policies in 2007 and have committed to bringing Virtues Education into Nelson Park School. I wanted to take the opportunity of this award to research Virtues Education in schools and to visit educational institutions who have successfully implemented this programme. The Virtues Project was created in Canada, which I visited and meet the people who have developed it.

How does the Virtues Project Work?

Justice, Service, Respect, Tolerance, Kindness and Trust are at the very heart and purpose of meaningful lives. They are universally valued by people of all cultures. Using the Virtues renews our connection with the values that give direction to our lives. People are encouraged to mentor our children and to build safe and caring schools and communities. Historically punitive approaches to building character in schools and homes have produced:

Fear of authority

People-pleasing

Rebellion

Guilt

Deception - "It's OK as long as I don't get caught"

Therefore other ways needed to be found to develop a school culture that is hard on the act not the actor and to reassure children and adults that the gifts from within are in all of us. The Virtues Project provides simple ways to bring out the best in our children and ourselves. Using the five strategies of the Virtues Project provides a framework for positive change. Integration of Virtues into the curriculum and pupil management systems means students learn in the context of everyday interactions. The aim is to build character by encouraging people to be responsible for their actions by practising honesty, respect, tolerance, cooperation...

The Five Strategies are:

Speak the Language of the Virtues – use Virtues to acknowledge, guide and correct

Recognise Teachable Moments – view life’s ups and downs as opportunities for learning

Set Clear Boundaries – offers a positive approach to discipline in an atmosphere of order and unity

Honour the Spirit – inspire school spirit and a sense of meaning and purpose among students and staff

Offer the Art of Spiritual Companionship – supports wellness, encourages sound moral choice and safe expression of feelings

Using virtues with the five strategies of the Virtues Project enables us to:

Cultivate respect & responsibility.

Build resiliency, authentic self-esteem & self-confidence.

Manage anger and counteract bullying behaviour.

Resolve conflict peacefully.

Learn to set boundaries for healthy relationships & safety.

Honour diversity & develop unity.

Why Virtues not Values?

Values are what we “value” and care about. They could be anything – becoming rich, or famous, or the most excellent burglar, or having power over others. But that doesn’t mean that we will have good character. Virtues are fundamental elements of character rather than principles or standards upon which values are based. While values are culture-specific, virtues are universally valued by all cultures striving to create healthy communities.

Virtues Project Integrated into our School Curriculum

The Virtues Project works when there is a whole school/community buy in, use of the five strategies mentioned previously and integration into the school’s curriculum. It is the school’s culture and ‘it is what we do around here!!’

Links to the NZ Curriculum 2007

The Vision, Principles and “Values” link well into the Virtues Project.

The core virtues are specified through the Vision, Principles and Values statements, which include Excellence, Respect, Caring, Integrity, Justice (Equity), Tolerance (Diversity), Creativity (Innovation), Cooperation (Participation), Responsibility (Community).

Suggested Learning Intentions could be:

- Demonstrate ways of maintaining and enhancing relationships.
- Express their ideas, needs and feelings confidently and listen sensitively to other people and affirm them.
- Use simple guidelines and practices that contribute to a physically and socially healthy classroom.

Suggested Success Criteria could be:

- To show understanding of what a virtue is.
- To identify simple virtues that they can use in everyday life.
- To apply the virtues in their interactions with others and to their experiences both inside and outside the classroom.
- To speak the language of the virtues.
- To acknowledge the virtues in themselves and in others.
- To affirm others and themselves.
- To increase self-esteem and empowerment.

How has our school benefited from being a Virtues School?

Becoming a Virtues School started with training for all teachers from a Virtues facilitator. Training was then given to all our support staff and caretaker, so they too understood the power of the language when interacting with children.

A teacher was appointed as the Virtues facilitator to workshop the Virtues Project with staff; introduce new staff and relievers to Virtues and to promote the 'gifts from within' at every opportunity.

Here are three examples of the positive behaviours we are cultivating by integrating the Virtues into our school and into all classrooms.

RESPECT

Signs of Success

- Treat others as you want to be treated.
- Speak courteously to everyone.
- Take special care of other people's belongings.
- Are receptive to the wisdom of elders.
- Honour the rules of your family and nation.
- Expect respect for your body and your rights.

CO-OPERATION

Signs of Success

- Work well with others.
- Freely offer your help and ideas.
- Follow the rules.
- Do your part to keep a safe, happy environment.
- When you disagree, do it peacefully.
- Ask for help when you need it.

EXCELLENCE

Signs of Success

- Give your best to whatever you do.
- Give your best to relationships.
- Set noble and realistic goals.
- Remember to plan and practise.
- Don't try to do everything.
- Develop your special gifts.

Conclusion

Parker Palmer (Author, Educator and Activist) wrote “New leadership is needed for new times, but it will not come from finding more wily ways to manipulate the external world. It will come as we who serve and teach and lead find the courage to take an inner journey toward both our shadow and our light – a journey that, faithfully pursued, will take us beyond ourselves to become the healers of a wounded world.”

Below is a poem by Reimi Nakagawa, a 5th grade pupil at the Hokkaido International School, Japan.

Virtues are for making friends.
Virtues are for happy ends.
At least you know one or two,
If you don't, I will tell you.
I think you know the virtue care,
You use it when you love and share.
If you care for your friends a lot,
You will share your ideas and a thought.
If you show everyone respect,
You will never be a suspect.
If you know friendliness,
You must know forgiveness.
Forgiveness is to think the right,
If you have a conflict or fight.
There are more virtues like
Courtesy, Honour, Loyalty,
Justice, Tact and Modesty.
These are the virtues that we need to know,
We can use them anytime, anywhere as we grow!

Become a Virtues School!!

Nevan Bridge