

Investigating the Effective use of Values in the Curriculum

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Executive Summary

The integration of values in the New Zealand Curriculum is well advanced in most schools. A variety of methods to achieve this are being used depending on the type, size and character of the school. The decile rating of the school does not seem to have any great influence on the way values are being integrated. There is also little difference in the actual values that are being included in a school's curriculum.

Most schools have identified the values they are including in their curriculum either through discussion with staff and students or through consultation with their communities. The values selected seem to be those values that are held by those in the local community such as honesty, respect, responsibility and kindness to name a few. Many schools use excellence and high expectation as added values in the school situation.

Some schools have adopted specific values programmes and use these as part of their school curriculum. The most widely known of these programmes is the Cornerstone Values Model. Schools are able to use this model to become registered cornerstone schools. Some schools use the cornerstone resources and model their own values programme that suits them around those resources.

Schools of special character tend to have set values prescribed for them and these are generally taught in a specific way. Many of these schools are of a religious character and have a long history of values teaching within their area of special character.

Individual schools are using a number of approaches to the teaching of values in the classroom and the school. The type of approach used depends on the school and the beliefs they have as a staff as to values teaching.

One approach is to use a focus value for a period of time. This may be weekly, monthly or by term depending on the needs of the school. The planning may be done classroom by classroom or on a syndicate or whole school basis. The focus value is named and integrated into curriculum planning by teachers. Specific lessons using appropriate resources are then taken in classrooms over the period of the focus. Between these specific lessons there is regular reinforcement taking place through the identification of positive acts where children both in classroom and school life demonstrate the focus value. As the year progresses the focus value changes however the other values are regularly revisited.

Another approach uses classroom life as the resource for teaching children values. In this approach the values are often identified and displayed on the wall. The teacher and children do the identification of these class values, as part of the class charter process. Reference to the values is an ongoing feature of classroom life. Often the classroom behaviour management plan uses the class values as the basis for discussion with children. The focus however is to catch children displaying positive values and being positive role models. The identification and celebration of these positive acts is a key activity in this approach. A positive class climate is developed based on the values selected.

A third approach to values teaching is a whole school and community programme based within the schools vision. This approach takes time in setting it up with wide consultation with the community being essential. This approach uses the school vision as its base. The vision states what the school is about and guides all members as to their actions within it. The values are integrated into the teaching programmes and are to the forefront of all discussion about learning and behaviour. This approach underpins the culture of the school and ensures that all who are part of the school community use common language have common beliefs and have the same expectations.

From my observations in a variety of schools all the described approaches work to develop a values base in the school. The effectiveness of each approach depends on the consistency of expectation and language used across the whole school. Students in each school visited displayed good values and were able to use values language. They knew what the expectations were and were able to discuss what it meant to show the values they held. To me an effective values programme is reliant not on the actual values used but on the consistency of approach throughout the school.

Purpose

The purpose of my sabbatical was to explore how schools are including the teaching of personal values in the New Zealand Curriculum and how the teaching of values relates to the Key Competencies. I also wanted to see how the teaching of values impacted on the culture of the school.

The information gathered would allow me to make better choices as to the values programme in my own school.

Background

During the last two years we have been developing our school's curriculum in line with the New Zealand Curriculum. We have looked at the area of Key Competencies and Values and have explored ways we can include them as part of our curriculum. We have used the cornerstone values as a resource and tied both the Key Competencies and the values to our school vision of "Effective Learners, Effective Citizens". I was interested as to how other schools were approaching this in developing their curriculum.

Methodology

Before I began my sabbatical I developed a questionnaire, which I e-mailed around my local schools. I arranged to meet with a number of Principals and to visit a variety of schools around the South Island. The Principals with whom I met while on my trip were provided with the questionnaire that they e-mailed to their colleagues. The replies were e-mailed back to my school where they were picked up after my trip.

I collated the replies to form a picture of how schools were including values teaching in their curriculum and to gauge the effectiveness of their programmes.

Schools that provided data numbered twenty-nine from Marlborough to Southland. The decile range of schools was from one to ten. The roll of schools ranged from forty-six to five hundred and one. Sixteen of the schools were urban while the rest rural. Nine schools were full primary while the others were contributing. Four schools were of special character and four used Cornerstone Values.

Findings

I found that schools around the South Island were well advanced in developing their school curriculum based on the New Zealand Curriculum. A great deal of consultation has taken place with school communities. Many hours of work by Principals and teachers have been put into the new curriculum. Integration of the Key Competencies has been a major task in schools as they struggle to decide how they will look in their schools. What should be assessed and how this should be done and what reporting needs to take place are all issues that have been tackled by schools. Along with the KCs issue, has been the work done around the teaching of personal values in the school. A variety of approaches are being used depending on the size of school and the thoughts and beliefs of the Principals and staff. Some schools have included the values question in their consultation process while other schools have been guided by their special character or the general perception of their community while others have used established values programmes such as the Cornerstone Values. All schools teach values as part of the curriculum. Many have been able to align them to the Key Competencies while others have used the establishment of their school vision as the basis for values teaching.

Some schools use a focus value for a period of time with regular review when they move to the next focus. Some programmes are classroom based while others are syndicate or include the whole school. Many are using their values programme as part of the behaviour management plan in the school.

The teaching of values in schools adds to the development of a positive school culture. It provides the school community with a framework in which to live as an effective community. This seems to work not because of the approach used but because of the consistency of use. The actual values taught are not as important as the consistency of expectation and language used when talking with children about values.

In my opinion the whole school approach where values are included as part of the school vision is the most effective method of teaching values. This is because with everyone on board there is consistency throughout the school community from children through to parents and the Board of Trustees. In this situation the values are not just being taught but the expectation is that they are being lived.

Implications

The development of a values teaching component of the curriculum is best done as part of the schools vision development. It should include the Key Competencies but more importantly it should be lived and provide guidance for the community. It is the basis of a positive school culture.

At Redwoodtown we have adopted the cornerstone values and along with the Key Competencies have aligned them with our school vision. Our vision is “Effective Learners, Effective Citizen”. We see the values as being essential for effective citizens and the Key Competencies being needed by effective learners. Our language in the school about learning and behaviour is around our ability to be these things.

Conclusion

The teaching of values in the curriculum is important for all schools. How this is done is up to each individual school. The impact of values teaching shows up more within schools through the school culture than outside it. The influence, on students who do not hold the school values out of school, can be positive by effecting change in their attitude but this is not a regular occurrence. The benefits are more within the school and on the lives of members of that community while they are in the school.

References

The New Zealand Curriculum, Ministry of Education, Learning Media 2007.

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