

L'RACE: A VALUES-BASED PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT

Values education is a lifelong learning literacy – a moral literacy – essential in a postmodern world. A values pedagogy proposes a partnership between teaching about values and modelling the values for students, resulting in a shared teaching discourse about achieving significant learning outcomes for students.

INTRODUCTION

Learning is no longer comprised of fixed content that is delivered at a fixed time in a learning institution. The knowledge economy, with its rapid changes in technology and collaborative corporate culture, relies on people who continue to learn and relearn. Our social fabric is under pressure from this rapid change, forcing individuals to “choose consciously between alternatives ... instead of relying passively on long-established grooves of custom, habit and tradition” (Hill, 1971, p. 54). Successful individuals are those with the personal capacities to make intelligent and principled decisions. This new paradigm of lifelong learning significantly challenges what we teach, so “the new learning is less about imparting defined knowledge and skills and more about shaping a kind of person” (Australian Deans College of Education, 2005, p. 21). What kind of students and teachers are we shaping in our schools? This paper describes some of the journey in understanding values-based lifelong learning pedagogies taken by staff of Mackay Christian College and their partners as we answer this question.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Clarifies purpose

When asked to describe why they teach in a certain way, most teachers find it hard to put their reasons into words (...“it’s just automatic”). Yet the effect of the knowledge economy upon teachers is real. Teachers who shelter in their “long established grooves” of teaching find themselves to be increasingly ineffective in a stressful work environment where change is spiralling out of control. The L’RACE values-based pedagogy challenges teachers to become more conscious of their pedagogy and the direct impact it has on student learning. (L’RACE is an acronym from the values Learning, Respect, Attitude,

Christlikeness, and Excellence developed by Mackay Christian College [MCC]). By being more purposeful in achieving significant lifelong learning outcomes for students, teachers clarify their roles and are more efficacious in managing change (Fullan, 1993, p. 4). The pedagogy’s framework acts as a “sense making” framework for teachers to articulate their learning to others, and to reflect on their performances and professional learning. As it is based on shared values; teachers are “talking the walk”(Willis and Murison, 2004) and re-articulating a shared moral purpose that is creating a real lifelong learning community for students *and* staff.

An embedded influence

Teachers are the heart of a values-based education community. Hattie (2005) notes the epicentre of causal effects of learning is the teacher. The book, *The Moral life of Schools* (P. W. Jackson, R. E. Boostrom, and D. T. Hansen, as cited in Halstead and Taylor, p. 177) reported on a major research project that the authors had undertaken in Chicago from 1988 to 1990. In it they noted that while teachers were mostly unaware of their impact, “the indirect moral influence on children is deeply embedded in the daily life of the school, either within normal teaching activities or within the contingent interactions at classroom level”. Williams (1993) found that teachers who were most successful in teaching moral education were those whose students believed their teachers demonstrated the principles of the program in their everyday behaviour (Curriculum Corporation, 2005, p.182). Carr (2003) concludes that there is no separation between the moral and the technical in teaching. Values thus provide a natural framework within which to view principles of pedagogy. Values education at Mackay Christian College is not something to be taught merely as an add-on to an already crowded curriculum. Rather it is “the way we do things around here”.

Synergy and community

The L'RACE pedagogy framework, which is based on shared values, magnifies the power of the individual teacher to effect significant change in students. By using a common values framework, there is alignment between *why* we teach, *what* we teach, and *how* we teach. This creates a powerful and supportive values-based learning community. As Halstead and Taylor note, the moral climate of the school must be

METHODOLOGY

At MCC, our values are CLEAR, we CARE. These acronyms represent values of Christlikeness, Learning, Excellence, Attitude and Respect. They are embedded in our school and organizational culture, our curriculum and

consistent with the values promulgated through direct instruction (p.176). Prosser and Deakin (as cited in Halstead and Taylor, 1997, p. 189) also suggest that the school's explicitness about its values, and the extent to which teachers share values in practice, have an important influence on pupils' values development. The use of acronyms and metaphors to make values based pedagogy explicit has been a key strategy for success in creating a language in which to be explicit about values development

pedagogy. Rearrange the values acronym CLEAR and you have L'RACE – the "Learning RACE" – based on the metaphor of a life journey in Hebrews, chapter 12, in the Bible. Each letter of L'RACE stands for a pedagogy principle that embodies the value shared by the same letter.

Inspiration from Hebrews 12		L'RACE dimension	
Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses (v 1)	<i>show</i> >	Leadership in learning	LEARNING
Submit to the Father of our spirits and Live! (v 9)	<i>with</i> >	Right relationship and enjoyment	RESPECT
Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us (v1)	<i>by</i> >	Affirming individuals	ATTITUDE
Let us fix our eyes on Jesus (v 2)	<i>for</i> >	Clear vision and goals	CHRISTLIKENESS
Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for Your feet so that the lame may Not be disabled but rather healed. (v 12 – 13)	<i>by</i> >	Embracing challenge	EXCELLENCE

Table 1. Dimensions of the L'RACE pedagogy

Thus, teachers, in their pedagogy practices, model the values we are seeking to grow in students. The values are clothed in meaning through discussion, shared planning, and collaboration.

Locating the pedagogy principles

In their review of values education literature, Halstead and Taylor note that "bringing together a number of different teaching and learning approaches ... is much more effective ... than

adopting a single approach in isolation" (p.189). Drawing from professional reading, as well as the shared life experience and learning, staff discussed what constituted significant learning for students and the pedagogy practices that were seen to be achieving these outcomes. The key student outcomes were synthesised into a description of what intellectual performances and qualities of character graduates from our college should achieve, and these were called "Lifelong Learning Graduate Attributes" our "Vision of a Learner" (Table 2).

value	application	vision of a learner outcome.
CHRISTLIKENESS Clear vision and goals	Learning how to be a servant	Emphatic servant leaders
LEARNING Leadership in Learning	Learning how to respond to and shape the world around us for His kingdom	Self directed strategic producers
EXCELLENCE Embracing challenge	Learning how to live a Christian life in a non Christian world	Resilient problem solvers
ATTITUDE Affirming Individuals	Learning to understand who we are in God	Creative, reflective investigators
RESPECT Right Relationship	Learning to communicate in a way that values others	Responsive communicators

Table 2. Mackay Christian College – “Vision of a Learner”.

Heroes of the school teaching staff were remembered and their skills identified to become a description of the best “way we do things around here”. Significantly, the importance of positive relationships emerged as a focus, reflecting both the unique Christian culture of the college, but also the nature of effective values education.

Brian Hill (1971, pp. 61-65), in discussing the benefits of combining the rationalist and behaviourist approaches in values education, notes that relationship is necessary before values-based reasoning develops. Hill’s definition of moral maturity is not one that stops at a cognitive capacity for moral reasoning but, instead, includes the relationship outcomes that demonstrate a “capacity for personal respect”. This kind of moral maturity develops over a long period of time, and in partnership with parents. It is a challenge for teachers to also be lifelong learners who are continuing their journeys to moral maturity, and they succeed within a learning community teaching the moral literacy of values.

RESULTS

As a result of the discussions about values-based pedagogy, staff at Mackay Christian College self published a professional coaching manual: *L’RACE – Teaching for Learning for Life. A Values Based Pedagogy*. With stories from the classroom, pictures of staff in action, quotes, lists, self questions, and more detailed explanations of the L’RACE pedagogy, it has become an iconic reference for staff. The

magazine format and accessible language makes professional reading easy for busy teachers. Tools within the magazine format include a “Professional Learning Framework” for personal performance evaluation and reflection, planners for professional learning, coaching forms, a student survey, and discussion starters for use in staff meetings, mentoring, and induction partnerships. It has been a very successful way of making an intangible priority of values-based pedagogy very visible within a large school community. Since then, subsequent manuals applying L’RACE principles to Curriculum, Culture and Leadership have been written by school staff.

Partnerships

Feedback from partners within nine Christian schools throughout Queensland during an Australian Government Quality Teacher Program in 2003; and from over thirty Christian schools throughout Australia, South Africa, and Korea; has clarified and refined our understanding of values-based pedagogy. As we send teachers from our school to workshop with teachers from other schools, questions and ideas stimulate further understanding for us. Partnership with others is enhancing our own learning journey.

From paper to practice

Some teachers rapidly embraced the concept of L’RACE; others took time; and a few staff members are still waiting for it to disappear under another wave of inevitable change. We

judge its success by the significant increase of the L'RACE language in the informal conversations teachers have about their daily work. It is much more difficult to measure the success of these pedagogy practices on the development of values in our students. Silcock and Duncan (Curriculum Corporation, 2001, p. 182) warn that any belief that pupils will gradually internalise worthwhile pursuits, through immersion in a value-laden environment, is problematic, as we simply do not know whether or not they will. The Curriculum Corporation concluded their literature review about values education noting that "many problems [in researching values education effectiveness] remain ... the quality is very mixed. Some areas of school practice are notably under researched ... [through] carefully thought out and targeted research" (2004, p. 82). Our plans for the future include action research of the assessment of values education and, by implication, of the pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

This paper reports on a part of the learning journey of the Mackay Christian College towards the goal of becoming a values-based learning community. Together, students and teachers are learning the power of learning and living in alignment with eternal and shared values. The exploration of values has enriched the personal and professional lives of the teachers involved and created a glue which has helped to keep the school focused on improving the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual learning of the school's 1100 students.

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