

Values News

/ˈvæljuːz/ the things of social life (ideals, customs, institutions, etc.) towards which the people of the group have an affective regard.

Macquarie Dictionary, Third Edition, 1997 revised 2001

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Values - Alive and Well!

Christmas time is the right time to think about our values

What is important to us and our families or loved ones; what type of society do we want Australia to be ?

Then when you've worked out what you think is important, try putting yourself in other people's shoes. We all live in the same country but many of our values may be different or we may put stronger emphasise on some more than others.

For all parents and educationalists it's a fascinating subject which is why ACSSO is working alongside the Australian Government to encourage debate and to look for examples of good values at work. After all, values are at the heart of what our schools teach and also what they practise.

ACSSO's Surveys and Focus Groups

Here are the questions we asked parents, teachers and education administrators at our Values Education forum and focus groups at ACSSO's National Conference in October. There's more to come early next year as we try to find answers to the following questions.

1. What kind of person do we want our children to become; what values do we want them to have?
2. Do we practise what we preach about values in our workplace, our schools, in public life?
3. How important are national symbols such as flags and anthems?
4. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1=very poor, 10=perfect) how would you rate Australian society in the way we practise the following values?
 - Care and compassion
 - Doing your best
 - Freedom
 - Honesty and trustworthiness
 - Integrity
 - Respect
 - Responsibility
 - Understanding, tolerance and inclusion
5. In terms of positive values, what should parents look for when choosing a school or deciding to keep their child in that school?
6. How important is organized religion when we teach and practise values? What role does spirituality play in general?
7. How can schools and parents play a role in encouraging the nine core *Values for Australian Schooling* listed above?
8. How can parents and schools come to share a mutually agreed set of values then to inculcate that agreed set of values in the students?

So far, the results have been fascinating. For example, we have found very strong differences between our participants about flags, anthems and other symbols of national values. Again there was disagreement about the role that faith or spirituality plays in our values system.

As for practising what we preach in our schools and our public life, there were some interesting viewpoints. A common view that did emerge is that we often expect people in public life to practise values at a higher standard than ourselves. Most people admitted they could tell little white lies and that being tactful often comes close to telling a fib. Similarly, tolerance can sometimes be confused with apathy and some people think their faith is superior to others.

So, where to from here? We plan to hold more focus groups to analyse attitudes, and write a report to show the results. We feel that unless people understand the subtle variations in each others' values, there is a danger that values will be promoted in a tokenistic way and will not be embedded in what we do in our schools and homes.

Early next year ACSSO will be publishing papers by values experts such as Associate Professor Brian Hill of Murdoch University and others who will help us go deeper. After that, it's values in the curriculum. That is why ACSSO is doing the ground-work now so that values education is not just a passing fad.

Different Values

Since we often have shared values and sometimes our values differ, the Australian Government and State and Territory Education Ministers have settled on the Nine *Values for Australian Schooling* that they believe should underpin Australian education.

Differences will emerge but it is how we deal with those differences that will say something about our society's values.

That's the kind of challenge that faces public schools around this country. Our public schools must take everybody, regardless of race, religion or creed. That rich variety is one of the reasons why many parents deliberately choose the public system for their kids.

No School Value Free

The one thing that ACSSO recognizes is the fact that no school is values free. Our public schools teach values within the curriculum, they practise it everywhere in the school environment and they commend and identify good values in action.

Federal Funding Program

The Australian Government is providing funding for a large number of education stakeholders to pursue action research projects in this area. ACSSO is part of that process and is delighted that the national Values Education programme is deepening and going beyond symbols and slogans. It is the debate we had to have.

National Values Conference

ACSSO's National Conference is our forum to contribute to the key education debates. In October this year, in Canberra, we added extra days to our Conference so that we could bring in special speakers and run a forum and focus groups, all with values as the theme. Stay tuned, parents and teachers.

Emeritus Professor Brian Hill gave a beautifully constructed presentation about values which will appear on ACSSO's web-site in late January (www.acsso.org.au). He was preceded by Michael Carr-Gregg and Richard Eckersley, two of the most pre-eminent thinkers about kids, parents and the processes through which we all derive and practise our values.

Brian Hill then facilitated a forum on values accompanied by two focus groups run by ACSSO Executive Officer Terry Aulich and Rob McConchie. Further focus groups will follow in other cities and regions.

How can readers contribute to the ACSSO Values project?

In a few words, parents and families can:

Tell us about the person you want your child to be by the time he/she leaves school, or

Tell us about how you would like your school to talk with you about values, or

Tell us about the things that your school does to make your child like going to school each day.

In a few words, principals and schools can:

Invite ACSSO to give you a call with a view to publicising some of the ways that your school teaches values. (we can publish your story on our website or in this newsletter, or in a special newsletter)

Tell us about how you have successfully engaged your community (on any important issue).

Visit the ACSSO Values website

ACSSO has been developing a dedicated part of its website to the issue of values in our schools. We start with the proposition that values are indeed *alive and well* in our public schools. Many schools are now sharing their stories about values on the website. Why not take a few minutes to describe how your school contributes to the development of strong values in the student community?

Go to <http://www.acsso.org.au/val/valgoodnews.htm>.

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