

REPORT ON THE 2009 NATIONAL VALUES EDUCATION CONFERENCE

“VALUES IN ACTION-SHAPING POSITIVE FUTURES”

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The National Values Conference was held in Canberra on Thursday 30 April and Friday 1 May 2009. Values Education became a national focus in 2003 and this conference focussed on the applications of Values Education in school and community settings.

The keynote address on Thursday was given by Dr Ruth Deakin Crick from the University of Bristol, United Kingdom. Dr Crick spoke of values and learning being twin sides of the same coin; values shaping the student’s journey towards a chosen learning outcome. On the journey are four key stations- the identity and story of the student, the personal qualities necessary for the journey, the knowledge and understandings that inform the curriculum and the competencies required for life in the 21st century. There needs to be new approach to inquiry based learning where the student becomes a knowledge worker rather than a knowledge collector. Dr Crick drew on her experiences working with a disadvantaged primary school in Bristol and the effect an inquiry based curriculum had on the school and the local community.

A number of workshops were offered over both days. I attended “Toward a Curriculum of Giving: Transforming education from within” and “Values in Action School Project: Building Inclusion.”

“Toward a Curriculum of Giving” was presented by Thomas Nielsen from the University of Canberra. Dr Nielsen spoke of Seligman’s positive psychology and Post’s new science of love as well as his own research with students at the University. As a Health and Physical Education teacher I was intrigued to learn that giving (and giving is not just making financial donations to charities) was the highest predictor of improving health- more than exercising four times a week. I will continue exercising though as well as increasing my givingness (be more positive towards people and less judgemental). Dr Nielsen believes a curriculum of giving is one of the most effective ways to develop individual and communal wellbeing and create optimal learning environments for schools and other educational institutions. He has a compelling argument.

The workshop on “Values in Action Schools Project: Building Inclusion” was conducted by teachers from a values cluster in Western Australia. The presentation looked at how values could be reported to parents. Western Australia has used descriptors to report to parents on values for a number of years but teachers have concerns about the evidence used to make these judgements (and who wouldn’t be concerned- is a teacher presuming values exist because of demonstrated behaviour?). Action research was used to develop a shared values language and a means of collecting evidence. The presenters posited a shared student task; designing a machine while being observed by parents as one way of collecting evidence. Reservations were expressed about this method by the audience which resulted in an interesting discussion.

Another keynote address was given by Professor Terry Lovat Thursday afternoon. This keynote was preceded by students from secondary schools speaking about their experience with values education. This was of great interest and worth to the conference attendees. Professor Lovat’s address was titled “What works: Values and wellbeing pedagogy as best practice.” He stated that Values Education had a two tasks- the first to establish an environment of respect, trust and care and secondly to teach values. A way of looking at values education was as a troika (a Russian sled led by three horses abreast) with the horses being Values Education ,Quality Learning and Service Learning.

The Curriculum Corporation gave information on data it was gathering from 143 school communities.

The highlight of the Conference for many people was the Dinner speaker- Elida Brereton, Principal of Camberwell High School and Summer Heights High. Elida gave a very entertaining and enlightening address about her experiences as the head honcho at Summer Heights.

Friday’s program begun with a keynote address by Ameeta Wattal, Principal of Springdales School, New Dehli. Springdales is a school of 5,000 students based on the philosophy of the English school Bedales. The school’s motto is “the world is a family” and it is connected to 1,000 schools worldwide. The operation and curriculum of the school was somewhat different from

Australian schools with a focus on community service and personal growth. It was a fascinating presentation from which Australian educators could learn

The workshops I attended on Friday were “Values in Action Schools Project-Engaging the Disengaged” and “Different Times, different times, different values?” The first workshop was about a project conducted in 10 schools in juvenile detention centres in Australia where young people in detention were asked to ‘give beyond themselves’ with remarkable results. The second workshop was presented by the writer Ursula Dubosarsky who I had spoken to at the dinner and had become interested in her perspective on values. I believe it is important to hear about things happening outside schools and universities and Ursula’s presentation of a writer’s desire to be authentic to her readers was of relevant to all educators.

The Conference provided me with a multiplicity of avenues to explore on the values journey and I hope to lead others on a tour of the values world at the JCQTA Values Forum in August.