

UNIT TITLE:

Democratic Decision Making in Primary School

Writer/Management:

SOSE Consortium in ACT. This case study is based on a presentation at the national SEAA Conference 2001. Ann Holden and Marnie Carrison detailed the Active and Informed Citizenship Program at Hambledon Primary School.

Audience: Teachers and administrators designing democratic processes within the school environment

Purpose: The case study describes the key elements of the Hambledon program:

- Values of democratic process, social justice and ecological sustainability
- Knowledge of democratic rights and responsibilities, cultural diversity, inter-relatedness and a historical perspective of the development of citizenship
- Cognitive processes including active and investigative learning, critical and creative thinking, and decision making and problem solving
- Action skills including persona skills, interpersonal skills and community participation.

Links to Curriculum:

Whole school approach

Discovering Democracy links

Activities which prepare for Clean Up Day, fund raising activities, parades and eisteddfods, ethical behaviour, social justice, leadership.

Democratic Decision Making in Primary School

This case study details the work presented by Anne Holden and Marnie Carrison at the Social Education Association of Australia National Biennial National Conference 2001 “Empowering our Youth – Celebrating Federation”. Their presentation detailed the Active and Informed Citizenship Program at Hambledon Primary School.

At Hambledon State School in Far North Queensland, staff and students have evolved a system of democratic process for decision-making, including real participation by students, teacher, parents and community members. Based on a system of autonomous committees, which include all of the above members, this system empowers school community members to resolve issues, make decisions and employ creative decisions for the majority of the school and education functions. The following will show the processes now in place, and provide an overview of the advantages, and disadvantages of such a democratic system within a school. This case study will demonstrate how students can be given opportunities in a variety of circumstances, to be a real power within the school, and how teachers can participate in areas of their own choice, thus utilizing maximum interest and talents within the staff.

Overview of Hambledon State School

Hambledon State School is a large primary school that has rapidly grown over the preceding five years. As such the school felt that there was a need to develop structures where all members of the school community could feel that their contributions were valued. A system of democratic decision making was established to increase participation and express opinions. At Hambledon they believe that education “is about increasing people’s ability to participate successfully and productively in their society’s activities in the context of global interdependence. In a democratic society where citizenship entails rights and obligations, this participation is a co-operative process in which people work together to promote their individual and collective welfare. Understanding these activities and processes and how to contribute to them is the key to successful participation.”

Based on this belief the Hambledon Active and Informed Citizenship program was introduced. The key elements of this program include:

- ✓ Values of democratic process, social justice and ecological sustainability.
- ✓ Knowledge of democratic rights and responsibilities, cultural diversity, inter-relatedness and a historical perspective of the development of citizenship.
- ✓ Cognitive processes including active and investigative learning, critical and creative thinking, decision making and problem solving.
- ✓ Action skills including personal skills, interpersonal skills and community participation.

School Citizenship Scheme

This scheme is a way of rewarding citizenship in a non-competitive manner. Each student receives points for doing certain activities throughout the school. When a certain number of points is attained, then certificates and awards are obtained. Examples of activities that students complete include: student of the week, parades and eisteddfods, Clean Up Day, Sports days, choir and fund raising activities.

School Behaviour Management Program

The behaviour management committee at Hambleton meets monthly to discuss strategies and professional development needs. The program uses pro-active programs to assist students who are experiencing behavioural difficulties. Strategies that are used across the school include

- explicit teaching of rules and expectations
- four basic rules of Safety, Respect, Learning and Environment
- Peer Mediation
- Ethics or Religion classes
- inviting guests such as Adopt a Cop, Queensland Law Society, and Family counsellors
- Buddy teachers
- Adventure Based Decision Making.

Additionally, the school offers community based programs including parenting programs, karate program, precision marching, and a horticulture program.

Ethics Program

At Hambleton, religion classes are offered to all students conducted by ministers of religion. Students who do not attend these classes have an alternative Ethics program. Teachers are rostered to teach these classes and are supported through a variety of resources and a scope and sequence detailing the values covered throughout the program. This includes:

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| ✓ Respect for life | ✓ Justice |
| ✓ Respect for reasoning | ✓ Responsibility |
| ✓ Fairness | ✓ Freedom |
| ✓ Concern for the welfare for others | ✓ Honesty |
| ✓ Respect for diversity | ✓ Integrity |
| ✓ Peaceful resolution of conflict | ✓ Ecological sustainability |

Social Justice Activities

Social Justice activities at Hambleton include: Guidance, Special Education, Special Needs and Learning Support, Behaviour Management, Preschool, Student Council, Gifted and Talented and ASSPA. A committee where all members of the school and community are represented has the responsibility of implementing and supervising these programs. This committee meets on a monthly basis and reports are presented from all of these areas and issues are discussed.

Student Participation and Leadership Opportunities

Each year the senior students are encouraged to apply for positions on the student council. To be selected they must apply by addressing specific selection criteria, run an election campaign, including giving a speech at a school assembly. The school invites the Electoral officers from the AEC to teach the election officials and an Election Day is held. Students from grades 4-7 also elect two student councillors to represent their class for the year.

Once elected the students become office bearers for the student council and rotate through various positions. Meetings are held once a fortnight for an hour during school time. Meetings are spent learning skills of meeting procedures, school and committee structures and conflict resolution, and addressing agenda items. All classes are expected to have class meetings where issues are presented for the councillors and resolutions are brought back from council.

Student councillors also have the responsibility of coordinating a variety of student committees including playground, charities, communication, sport and technology.

Students also have an opportunity to be elected as Sports House Captain where they assist House teachers during preparation for and during sporting events.

Year 7 classes study government in Australia and each class then formulates a class parliament that holds sessions every week.

Students from year 4 – 7 are invited to apply to be Resource Centre Assistants. Two students from each class are selected and they are then trained and work in the resource centre.

Other leadership opportunities exist via buddy classes for Special Education students, Kidpower group and Golden Broom Award.

Cross Cultural Awareness

Cross-cultural activities at Hambleton include:

- ✓ Studying Aboriginal Laws and multiculturalism
- ✓ NAIDOC Week Celebrations
- ✓ Bafa Bafa Game – a cultures game.
- ✓ Blue Eyes, Brown Eyes role play
- ✓ ANZAC Day ceremony
- ✓ Remembrance Day
- ✓ Australia Day
- ✓ International Women's Day art competitions and writing tasks.
- ✓ Labor Day assembly
- ✓ National Days for other countries

Overall the school believes that the values and attitudes of the school and community feed into the shared decision-making for resourcing and professional development of students, staff and parents. They operate an inclusive curriculum utilising outcomes based key learning areas, and effective learning and teaching. This is encompassed in a supportive school environment that focuses on Active and Informed citizenship which provides a socially just education for all.