Mount Evelyn Christian School primary students have explored ways to prevent bullying by running a ‘Poetry for Peace’ project.

About Mount Evelyn Christian School

Mount Evelyn Christian School (MECS) is a coeducational P-12 school of 750 students in Mt Evelyn, Victoria.

What is the Poetry for Peace project?

As a Primary School, we had been exploring the issue of bullying. We had just had a visit from ‘Bully Busters’ and had begun talking with our classes as a follow up to the issues raised in the Bully Busters session. Year 5 and 6 had recently completed a poetry unit and had Cameron Semmens, a performance poet, in as an incursion to teach them about writing poetry. When we found out about the grant, it seemed a good idea to combine the two (bullying follow up and poetry) and thus the project was formed.

What were the aims of the project?

The aims were:

- To increase awareness of the aspects and impact of bullying through poetry and art.
- To promote a school culture that is the antithesis to bullying.
- To provide guidance on identifying and responding to bullying, for both parents and students.
- To use the booklet and learning from the workshops in our ‘culture week’ in Term 1, 2013 and in years beyond.
- To provide a resource for teachers to use when exploring bullying at MECS in the future.
- To provide an example to other schools as a way to use the grant money for the ‘Schools and Community Responses to Bullying’ grant from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
How was the project conducted?

We conducted a series of workshops with whole classes (Years 3-4 and 5-6) and small groups exploring the issues associated with bullying and developing a culture that is anti-bullying, led by class teachers (whole class) and Cameron Semmens, a performance poet who also works with Bully Busters as a presenter, working with small focus groups of 4-6 students at a time.

The students wrote poems centred around being bullied, being a bystander, and responding to bullying. They also explored creating an anti-bullying culture (we called it the antithesis of bullying) using the ‘Fruits of the Spirit’ from the Bible (love, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness, self control, goodness, peace and faithfulness).

What were the outcomes of the project?

The poetry was selected by Cameron and was published in-house as a booklet, illustrated by selected pieces by Primary students exploring the themes through art. Half of the poems were ‘bullying’ poems and the other half the ‘antithesis’ poems. All students wrote poems and created art work, and a selection was used in the booklet. We used picture story books, youtube clips, students’ own experiences and visual images as prompts for the poetry and artwork.

We had an official launch of the booklet, where parents and friends were invited. The launch was led by students and was presented in a poetry format and included the students performing their poetry. The auditorium used was decorated with all of the artwork by the students, even those not included in the booklet. Each family received a copy of the booklet to take home.

What is the future of the project?

Teachers will use the booklet in circle times and in discussions/activities that are directed to culture building within the classes and the primary school as a whole.

The booklet and poems will be used in week 1 and 2 of Term 1 in 2013, where we set aside time in our primary school to specifically develop the culture in our primary school.

How was the project funded?

The project was funded by the ‘Schools and Community Responses to Bullying’ grant from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Contact

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