



# **Values as the Centrepiece of the School's Work**

**A Discussion Paper on Learnings from VEGPSP Stage 1**

**by**

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### **Participants**

A total of 160 schools were involved in the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 1. They are listed at the end of this summary.

## Prologue

This is a summary of what has been learned from the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 1 (VEGPS – Stage 1), which was funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) as one of the Values Education programme initiatives within its Quality Teaching Program. It pulls together the ‘good practices’ of the schools involved in the project as they tried to make values education a central part of their work. The fundamental message from the ‘good practices’ is that when school communities make values education an explicit and central aspect of their work, improved teaching and learning naturally follow. There is, to use a metaphor from genetics, a double helix linking values education with quality teaching. Making values the centrepiece of a school’s work can produce a level of harmony in the school, strengthen interpersonal relationships between teachers and students and develop mutual support structures between the home and school so that the quality of teaching and learning is improved. One of the VEGPSP – Stage 1 cluster coordinators whose values project focused on student action teams passionately described her involvement in the following terms:

*Facilitating a process that empowered all who participated to be better people and lead others to be better people has been a deeply satisfying experience. On reflection, the greatest teaching point in the student action teams’ framework was the continual challenge to actively listen to what the students had to say and allow for the information exchange between students to be the crux of our gatherings, not merely an introduction or reflection at the end. Such a strong framework (as provided by the student action teams’ approach to values education) enables the students to explore, learn and understand in a variety of ways. It gives students the scaffold they need to take risks and when things don’t go exactly as expected, a soft place to land. As an educator, I have always held as sacrosanct the need to put students at the centre of all I do. That I must ensure I don’t teach them the knowledge but teach them the skills to understand the knowledge. That good curriculum allows for this to happen, superficial curriculum allows students to regurgitate facts. It’s the connections and relationships that students identify that show us the depth of understanding they have come to. So if this has been my history, then what is my future? The adage, ‘If you always do what you’ve always done; you’ll always get what you’ve always got’ is so true, but this year we have attempted to ensure that hasn’t been the case. Not only have I operated within a completely new structure within the school by drawing students from six different classrooms; working with multi-age action teams; meeting and communicating with five other schools and outside agencies but the team of students and me have attempted to effect change in our community by valuing values. In the years to come, who knows how successful we will be. But in the immediate future, I know it has made me a better teacher and it has made the students believe they have a valid and important voice.*

## **The Values Education programme**

Since mid-2002, as part of its Quality Teaching Program, DEST has pursued values education as a government policy priority. The Australian Government has made a substantial investment in the values education enterprise since then, by assigning more than A\$30 million to the effort.

Suggesting that schools take values education from its previously marginalised position in the curriculum to a more prominent, even centralised position was a daring move by the Australian Government. The expressed reason for making values education a more prominent feature of national educational policy was that public schools were becoming increasingly 'values neutral', and parents were unhappy about that development. At the outset, it was said that 'parents are increasingly concerned to know who is teaching their children and what they are being taught. Kids being able to read, write, count and communicate when they leave school have always been priorities. But increasingly, parents are concerned to know education is being delivered within a values framework with which they feel comfortable' (*The Age*, 23 September 2002). However, behind the policy to encourage all Australian schools to develop comprehensive values education programmes, there is also an insightful educational perspective. At the time, much was said about the importance of schools building 'character', not only to help ensure students' personal fulfilment, but to contribute to the development of social capital. It was also said that 'character' is more beneficial than talent alone and that values education might play a role in 'character' development. Over the past four years DEST has been energetically pursuing the government's values education policy agenda. This has involved a process of community consultation that gave rise to the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools*.

## ***The National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools***

The Framework identifies nine core values and a process for having schools and their communities engage in formal, whole school values education programmes.

The nine *Values for Australian Schooling* articulated in the Framework are:

1. **Care and Compassion**  
Care for self and others
2. **Doing Your Best**  
Seek to accomplish something worthy and admirable, try hard, pursue excellence
3. **Fair Go**  
Pursue and protect the common good where all people are treated fairly for a just society
4. **Freedom**  
Enjoy all the rights and privileges of Australian citizenship free from unnecessary interference or control, and stand up for the rights of others

5. **Honesty and Trustworthiness**  
Be honest, sincere and seek the truth
6. **Integrity**  
Act in accordance with principles of moral and ethical conduct, ensure consistency between words and deeds
7. **Respect**  
Treat others with consideration and regard, respect another person's point of view
8. **Responsibility**  
Be accountable for one's own actions, resolve differences in constructive, non-violent and peaceful ways, contribute to society and to civic life, take care of the environment
9. **Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion**  
Be aware of others and their cultures, accept diversity within a democratic society, being included and including others

The Framework envisages the adoption by schools of the values and the development of whole school values programmes. This would involve the following:

- Whole school planning whereby values education is made an explicit goal of school planning.
- The formation of partnerships within the school community whereby schools consult parents, caregivers and families within their communities on values to be fostered and approaches to be adopted.
- A whole school approach in which schools apply their values education priorities to their overall curriculum provision, structures and policies, procedures and rules, funding priorities, decision-making arrangements, disciplinary procedures, community relations and welfare/pastoral care approach.
- The provision of a safe and supportive learning environment whereby schools provide a positive climate within and beyond the classroom to help develop students' social and civic skills and build their resilience and responsibility and to ensure a safe and supportive environment for values education. Students, staff and parents are encouraged to explore their own values. Values education reflects good practice pedagogy and is introduced in the curriculum at appropriate times for learners.
- The provision of support for students so that schools develop programmes and strategies to empower students to participate in a positive school culture and to develop their local, national and global responsibility. Schools use values education to build students' social skills and resilience. This includes addressing issues such as behaviour management and discipline, violence and bullying, substance abuse and other risk behaviour, disconnectedness and alienation, student health and wellbeing, improved relationships and personal achievement.
- Quality teaching procedures in which teachers are skilled in good practice values education, provided with appropriate resources to support their efficacy as

teachers of values within all areas of the curriculum and total school life and to monitor this efficacy on an ongoing basis.

With the Framework endorsed by all State and Territory Education Ministers, DEST has more recently been concentrating its efforts on identifying ways schools can effectively implement the Framework. VEGPSP – Stage 1 was a major attempt in this regard.

### **Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 1**

VEGPSP – Stage 1 was funded by the Australian Government through DEST and managed by Curriculum Corporation. It was designed to work towards the vision, as expressed in the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* (2005), of all Australian schools providing values education in a planned and systematic way as a central aspect of their work. More explicitly, the project aimed to fund selected clusters of school communities to explore ways of improving their approach to values education and to identify effective ways of putting the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* into practice.

The project funded 26 selected clusters of school communities to explore ways of improving their approaches to values education and identify effective ways of implementing the National Framework in their schools. The clusters, their participating schools and a cameo of each of their approaches to implementing the Framework are listed below.

Some 140 clusters applied to participate in the project. The successful 26 involved 160 schools and some 70,000 students engaging the challenge of implementing the National Framework. These clusters were selected on the basis of rigorous criteria, including how their projects were aligned with the procedures for establishing comprehensive values education programmes suggested in the National Framework.

DEST adopted a ‘ground up’ approach with the VEGPSP – Stage 1. Such an approach is consistent with the fact that the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* is precisely that, a framework that is open to interpretation in terms of its implementation. Thus, the Department sought to nurture ‘good practice’ values education, learn from it, describe it and recommend it to others. Consequently, there was a research component to VEGPSP – Stage 1, which was intended to strengthen any recommendations for implementing the National Framework that arose from the project.

The work of clusters and schools, therefore, was constantly scrutinised through an action research process. The overall aims of the action research were to continuously improve the values education programmes of the clusters in their own particular contexts and to shed light on what constitutes ‘good practice’ in successfully implementing the National Framework. Clusters, working with University

Associates Network colleagues, subsequently used action research together with a range of other data such as accounts of their teaching experiences, patterns of student achievement, records of student work and attendance records to develop case studies of their work.<sup>1</sup> These have been synthesised into the account of the good practices that follow.

These good practices are then distilled into a set of guiding principles for successfully implementing the National Framework and moving the values education enterprise along. They are presented here both as a celebration of the achievements of the VEGPSP – Stage 1 clusters as well as an invitation for others to take up the challenges associated with finding those ‘good practices’ that lead to the successful implementation of the National Framework.

### **The challenge of identifying ‘good practice’**

During VEGPSP – Stage 1, the first of a series of attempts to see the National Framework implemented, two key issues emerged. First, because of the non-prescriptive nature of the Framework there are almost limitless ways to approach its implementation. Second, in the absence of some criteria, the notion of ‘good practice’ is relatively ambiguous. Thus, in order to identify and recommend ‘good practice’, we have asked in what way has any particular approach to implementing the essence of the Framework improved student learning. That is, are there things about adopting a whole school approach to the implementation of the National Framework that we can identify in the cluster case studies that contribute to improved student learning? Are there things about what is taught, how it is taught and how the school is connected to the community that do the same? These themes of whole school involvement in the values education enterprise, the content of the programme, the quality of the teaching and connecting with the community, are arguably the essence of the National Framework:

1. Whole school approach to implementing the Values Framework – Guiding Principle 3 of the Values Framework (articulates the values of the school community and applies them) and Guiding Principle 4 (values education that occurs in partnership with students, staff and families as part of a whole school effort) as well as Key Elements A (making school values explicit with the assistance of the school community) and C (whole school provision) of the Values Framework
2. Having something worthwhile to teach – consistent with Guiding Principle 7 (includes the provision of curriculum that meets the individual needs of students) and Key Elements E (support for students) and F (Quality Teaching)
3. Quality Teaching and Learning – consistent with Key Elements D, E and F (safe and supportive learning environment, support for students and quality teaching)

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<sup>1</sup> The Final Report which includes these case studies will be published at <http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/>

4. Connecting to the community – consistent with Guiding Principle (partnerships) and Key Elements A and B (school planning and partnerships within the school community).

### **Good practices about whole school approaches to values education**

In the case studies, there are several accounts of the success schools had in improving student learning by concentrating on a whole school approach to values education, most notably in the small community schools in Western Australia and some of the faith-based schools, including the group of Christian colleges in Queensland and Modbury Primary School in Adelaide. As might be expected, in some cases adopting a whole school approach came naturally; as seen at the Western Australian community schools. In such cases, a sense of collective purpose permeates the day-to-day work of the schools. The solidarity within the group becomes a form of reassurance for teachers and students alike. It acts as strong positive reinforcement for the programme and thus contributes to good learning outcomes.

In cases where there is less unanimity about the explicit values base of the school other strategies, it seems, are important for engaging the school community in the values education enterprise. One school recounted that:

*The cluster coordinators undertook a **philosophical journey** of their own, through the whole notion of a 'good life'. The philosophical and moral authenticity of the National Framework values needed to be validated by us before we could confidently move forward and genuinely and responsibly accommodate community input to the framework.*

In this project, the coordinators felt they needed to convince themselves, so to speak, about the value of values education before any attempt was made to initiate the involvement of colleagues. Together, the coordinators initially worked through a very considered professional discussion about what constitutes a 'good life' and what their school was potentially contributing. It was somewhat like a process of convincing themselves about the 'quality' of what they might have to 'sell' to their colleagues. In due course, they easily drew colleagues into the discussion, as many were passionate about the issue. The convictions they developed in the process are inevitably transparent to the young people in their classes and make an important contribution to the positive dynamic in the classroom.

In other circumstances, where a whole school approach to values education is not a natural occurrence, making values education a reality requires strategic planning, as the values framework implies. It requires someone (usually the principal) to initiate broad-based discussions about what values have support in the school community, to articulate those values and to put them at the centre of all school activity. As one of the principals in the WITS cluster bluntly put it, 'Get your values right, make them clear and put them everywhere!' The process one of the cluster schools followed in this regard is captured in the following case study prepared in consultation with the

school staff by the University Associates Network colleague who was involved in the project:

*Modbury is a small school of 168 students from 138 families. It is situated in a middle-income suburb of Adelaide. Modbury's journey in 2002 in values education started when the newly appointed principal began to develop her vision of creating a community school which would have connections between student learning and the wider community, and which encompass values that would shape the identity of the school and underpin a values-based curriculum framework.*

*The principal started by seeking the community's views about the school and their aspirations for their children. She wanted to know what they thought the school did well and what areas needed improving. The responses highlighted the need for the school to provide: 'an education that was holistic in nature; where students were given the opportunity to learn life skills; where the children were engaged in their learning and were happy to come to school'. The parents were clear that they needed the school to establish a supportive learning environment in order to reduce the incidences of harassment and bullying and re-establish the trust and confidence in the school. The staff shared this concern, as 15 or so students lined outside the principal's office door at every break, day in and day out during the first six months! It was the feedback from this consultation process that led the school to focus on identifying the 26 values that emerged from further community, staff and student feedback. The values focused on: improvement for learning; individual responsibility; and working together.*

*Committed to the ideal of empowering parents, the principal promoted a system of governance that offered the parents an opportunity to govern in partnership with the school. This translated to opportunities for parents to take on leadership roles in key strategic areas of the school and provided opportunities for parents to learn alongside the staff. As a result a number of sub-committees of governing council were established. This initiative saw an increase in participation of parents in decision-making across the school, particularly the participation by members of the school's Aboriginal community. This has subsequently led to the school giving priority to integrating Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum through programs that encourage the employment of Indigenous workers and community events that strengthen its commitment to reconciliation. This involvement of parents is now a key feature of the school, with parents leading the school in partnership with the principal.*

*It became clear to the principal, through her analysis of the school's culture and pedagogical practices, that the school needed to re-establish a culture that would reflect more clearly the values that were articulated by the community through the consultation process. These values were to have a lasting influence in setting the direction for change in a number of key areas. These included: the development of a school values charter that articulated the values into statements that came to underpin the vision for the school's values based culture; a student wellbeing policy that shifted behaviour management from a punishment paradigm to a values and relational model; a notion of accountability that emphasised clearer expectations of individual and collective responsibility for achieving the outcomes identified in the*

*school's strategic plan; and professional development and performance management practices that focused on the use of data to improve practice.*

There are many examples from the cluster schools about how schools choose to publicly express their values, ranging from pieces of sculpture carrying expressions of the school's values, to publicly visible student work samples reflecting the values. Again, the general feeling of consistency and common purpose that students and staff alike sense from this becomes a form of positive reinforcement that encourages both greater student participation and increased effort.

Nonetheless, orchestrating such whole school approaches was rarely an easy undertaking for the VEGPSP – Stage 1 schools. Parents and staff were not always prepared to engage the school's values initiatives. In such cases, where establishing whole school involvement in the values education programme is a challenging exercise, the insights from the good practice schools suggest that it is wise to establish a strategically located critical mass around the values education enterprise and let the programme speak for itself from there. Several schools, for instance, located their project in the middle school or at particular grade levels. Project personnel were then able to draw positive attention to the programme by having the students who were immediately involved publicly celebrate the outcomes of the project. This has two principal outcomes: First, it enables the students to develop through experiences of public presentation and by seeing their efforts publicly displayed, and second, it engages other staff in the values education enterprise by tapping into one of their basic professional instincts – the desire to see young people in their care happy and doing well.

In circumstances where the engagement of colleagues and parents is not widespread, several VEGPSP – Stage 1 project teams advise that it is unwise to try to force a values education initiative. Their consistent advice is to use an 'invitational approach'.

Several projects were able to marshal support within their community because of widely felt concerns about the 'tone' or 'ethos' of the school. In some cases, such concerns actually gave rise to their application to be part of VEGPSP – Stage 1. These projects set out to have their values education programme address issues about anti-social behaviour at school. Thus, some projects initially proposed developing a values programme around a commercial programme such as TRIBES®, Peer Support, You Can Do It or some other strategy such as restorative justice, in the hope it would change students' behaviour. With the passage of time staff members in these project schools sometimes observed that their efforts were contributing to their school becoming a calmer, 'nicer' and more caring place. In making a concerted effort to apply the values in the National Framework schools were changing their tone, and their ethos. Gradually respectfulness became a more evident part of school life and of the general character and tone of the schools. The significant improvement in the interpersonal relationships that accompanied these developments fed, in turn, into

the teaching and learning. At least two clusters began to wonder if there were connections between a school's emergent sense of harmony, the improved interpersonal relationships and the patterns of improved attendance and improved academic performance.

Some cluster schools, however, suggest that one way of promoting widespread discussion of values education is to audit the values that are seemingly implicit in the teaching that goes on at the school and use that as a basis for further discussion.

Finally, the experiences of many of the good practice schools suggest that developing a whole school ethos does not have to involve having as many members of the school community as possible consider the meaning of the nine core values in the Framework and their level of support for them. Several clusters and schools focused on a refined set of 'core' values drawn from the *Values for Australian Schooling*. Thomas Chirnside School in western Melbourne, for example, concentrated on three values: respect, responsibility and relationships. However, regardless of the number and nature of the values contributing to the ethos, many people point to the merits of having them documented in the school policies. An important aspect of this practice is the way it legitimises the values education programme.

### **Good practices about things worthwhile to teach**

Many project coordinators expressed frustration at their colleagues' unwillingness to participate in the project because of their perception that it would just add to their already 'too busy day'. The good practice schools that were able to overcome this perception often managed to do so by making the values programme a part of existing practice. For instance, in one school where the inquiry method was the predominant approach to teaching and learning, the project coordinator showed staff how to reshape the questions they were using to include a values focus. The values project was therefore subsumed into an existing well-accepted and successful teaching and learning strategy. In another case, a middle years' environmental education project was reconceptualised in terms of the values in the National Framework, rebadged and implemented as the cluster's values project.

Several clusters blended their projects into existing State or Territory curriculum frameworks. One in New South Wales adapted its project to the State's productive pedagogies framework and in so doing legitimised it for parents, teachers and students alike. A Northern Territory project dovetailed itself into the Territory's essential learnings with similar effect.

Several projects adopted the strategy of making one of the nine core values in the National Framework the centrepiece of everything the school did for a period of time – sometimes a week, other times considerably longer. In this way regularised practices were not disrupted, but the substance of school activity became much more values oriented.

## Good practices about quality teaching and learning

One of the key messages from the case studies is about quality teaching and its inseparable counterpart, quality learning. There are many examples of the way good teaching and learning flow naturally from placing values at the centre of school activity, and the school community subsequently trying to live the values on a day-to-day basis. Using the double helix metaphor again, this suggests that good practice values education is also quality teaching practice. Importantly, such an arrangement seems to affect how students feel about themselves and about school. In some cases schools reported improved attendance. Many reported substantial improvements in student effort. Some even attributed improved 'academic' performance to the way values education was being approached:

*One student in particular had experienced some difficulty in the discussion and planning stages of the project. He had recently come to our school, after having difficulties at his previous school, both in behaviour and academic achievements. He was not particularly eloquent when it came to making suggestions, nor enthused by the written survey process. However when it came to one on one surveys with younger students and the design and production of a classroom poster depicting the value of respect (again for students in a younger class) he displayed an interest and expertise that had not been shown in any other areas of his school work. Whether or not it was a product of his involvement with the Values Project is impossible to say, but since its implementation he has produced work in other areas far beyond anything that was earlier thought either possible or likely.*

It seems that when the school places values at the centre of its work and purposefully tries to live those values, the changes in student and teacher behaviour that follow gradually edge students and teachers into quality teaching and learning activity. In a phrase, the decision changes the nature of the personal and interpersonal relationships in the school. One teacher describes this changed pattern of relationships as follows:

*'What I hadn't anticipated, was how anxious I became when I realised that I had no idea or maybe 'control' of what would or could evolve at the end!! It took me ages and many, many hours of debriefing with our cluster coordinator and the other school coordinators to allow the seeds that had been sown to slowly shoot. Once I relaxed and took the pressure off myself, I then was much more open to enjoy and develop much better relationships with the children. An insight most definitely for me was I also realised that they had picked up on my 'tension' and consequently they became tense and unproductive too. When I relaxed, they relaxed also. I also laughed more, and they laughed too. It set up a ripple effect. Children who were not achieving started to really shine. The children now really do believe that they have a voice and can make a difference. I now believe that too and that if you want to genuinely change the 'culture' of your school, it is essential to listen to the children.*

When everyone in the classroom situation – teachers and students alike – is consciously trying to be respectful, trying to do their best, trying to be honest, trying to be tolerant and the like, the dynamic of the classroom changes. Everyone – children, adolescents and adults – all strive to do their best.

Such practice refreshes the teacher–student relationship, as one young person recounted:

*There used to be a whole lot of talk about values at the school but it was only talk. Now when you [the teacher] let me have some control [by using a student directed learning approach] I feel that you really do respect me. It's not just talk. That makes me want to do my best.*

From the teacher perspective the relationship is also refreshed:

*After reflecting, I now realise that it was in my time working with the children in the Values Action Team that often as teachers we spend a lot of time doing all of the talking and reflecting. It is when we step back and begin to listen to the ideas and opinions of the students that we begin to understand and appreciate their opinions. I have now become more comfortable stepping back and allowing the students to lead the conversation during our sessions together. At times I have found it challenging to allow the students to lead the discussions. However, when the students feel that they are being heard, they feel respected and appreciated. I have noticed some children have blossomed throughout their journey. After engaging with the student action team about the values they have researched, I have learnt a lot about these students. They have made me appreciate the interest and understanding they have of current affairs and the news in their daily lives. They could discuss current issues and relate them back to the values we were researching.*

On the part of the teacher, this leads to greater empathy, or an ability to understand a student's reactions from the inside, a sensitive awareness of what is happening for the student and, importantly, to capitalise on those insights to help the student learn.

More pragmatically, several good practice schools report benefits when teachers model the behaviour that has been identified as consistent with the values in the Framework:

*Values need to be taught and practised explicitly and that students identify the values prominent in a teacher's manner when interacting with students, and that students look to teachers for example.*

As one of the university associates points out, some teachers use surrogates to provide models of the values in the Framework. Maria teaches in the junior school at Modbury:

*There are two teachers in Maria's room: Maria the teacher and Bob the skeleton. Bob is a life-sized skeleton that Maria found discarded in a cupboard. She has given him a 'life' – a personality. He is someone who is portrayed as being good, wise and always doing the right thing. Maria projects the desired values on to Bob and attaches to his 'body' artefacts and messages that convey the theme of the moment. The children relate to Bob as a 'person' and Maria takes advantage of this to pose questions such as: 'What would Bob think about this?' Maria's Bob is invested with a major role to play in teaching the children about values such as empathy, kindness and consideration. Certainly, he helps the children see things from the perspective of another as well as providing a surrogate model for 'doing the right thing'.*

There are numerous accounts from teachers in the good practice schools of how ambiguous they initially found the list of values in the National Framework. In such form, they were an unlikely substance for teaching and learning. Over time, several good practice projects have successfully addressed this issue. Virtually all projects recount the importance of developing a 'shared language' for their values education programme – a language that is shared between all those involved, teachers, parents and students alike. Sometimes the shared language is arrived at through good values education teaching and discussing it with colleagues. At other times, it comes from interrogating the National Framework so that it correlates with the language the school uses:

*Our job became clear: to use our 'comfortable' community language, but to also remain faithful to the Framework values. 'My happiness ... My Choice', our values project 'umbrella concept' emerged! The correlations were unambiguous. The community and the National Framework were not speaking different languages!*

Several projects point to the importance of a *staged* approach to teaching the values. By this they mean that first the values have to be taught. Commonly this involves using Y charts (a graphic organiser that requires the brainstorming of ideas around three dimensions: what a particular topic/situation 'looks like', 'sounds like' and 'feels like') to establish agreed meanings. Second, it means the values have to be practised. This can mean a vast range of things, such as service learning programmes. It might also mean establishing and abiding by a code of classroom behaviour collaboratively fashioned by the teacher and class from the values. It might mean establishing a school or classroom policy whereby all negative behaviour is ignored, and as much behaviour as possible that is consistent with the shared meaning of the values is acknowledged and positively reinforced. The notion of always emphasising the positive is a constant theme in the best practice schools stories, as one of the secondary schools reports:

*The business services teacher decided to institute similar practice to the Year 7 roll call meet and greet, in her class, as it was standard business procedure. Students entered and left the classroom with a handshake accompanied by appropriate phrases. Many students had never encountered the skills of handshaking in the formal sense. This simple activity produced numerous **positive** spin-offs. Students all now knew and could demonstrate appropriate procedures. Many extended this activity to outside the classroom. The class settled into their work more readily, and conducted themselves in a more business-oriented manner during the class maintaining the formalities instigated by the initial entry to the room.*

Other projects, like the PEER SUPPORT programme<sup>2</sup> at Townsville, show how making values the centre of the school's work can help make the place calmer and more conducive to thoughtfulness, concentration and reflective ability. Some of this is captured in the following vignette from a classroom lesson that was reported by the project's University Associates Network colleague:

In preparation for the peer leaders advance briefing, over lunch, Ms Kashin rearranges the room in readiness for this afternoon's session – the focus of peacefulness. The room has been decorated with resources that signify peaceful places, such as beaches and rainforests. A recording of ambient music is playing in the background. In addition, a range of 'special' objects have been placed strategically around the room, including painted stones, soft toys and flowers.

Ms Kashin stands at the door as students re-enter the classroom, consciously greeting each student with a positive, calm tone.

'Can you get out your *Peer Support* boxes and remind yourself of what we did last week in our session? Who can tell me what we did in last week's session? How do you think it went? Let's have a think about what we might learn from where we were last week. Yes Simon – it was about peacefulness – what does that mean again?' Writing on the board – feeling calm, relaxed, in control, not worried. 'Did anyone take time this week to practise the quality of peacefulness? Yes, watching TV, kept peace at home, read a book. Yes, on Saturday I even spent some time on my own, while my son slept in, reading and watching the birds on the verandah. This week with your own group, you will need to ask them what they have done to practise peacefulness.'

'This week you will take your students through another activity related to peacefulness – it's called *finding a special place*. What do you think a special place might be?' Ms Kashin draws a Y chart on the board – 'What would a special place look like, sound like, feel like? Feel – safe/peaceful/happy...Look – beautiful/ like a beach...Sound – quiet/with music...'

'Let's take a minute to think what our own special place might be ... just quietly.'

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<sup>2</sup> In the PEER SUPPORT program older students are tutored to be able to emotionally and socially support younger ones at the school.

This vignette suggests a number of things about the link between values education and quality teaching: the calmness that often surrounds values education activity and how that can facilitate learning; the emphasis on being positive and on providing positive reinforcement; the highly structured teaching of the meaning of values by using Y charts; the spiritual dimension during which the students experience inner calmness; and the preparedness of Ms Kashin to present herself as a 'real' person (eg the way she refers to her Saturday morning) to whom the children can relate easily, which, of course, also facilitates their learning.

### **Good practices about engaging the community**

One of the key benefits expressed by the good practice schools about community engagement is how successfully involving the community in the values programme can provide students with an overall sense of consistency about the purpose of schooling and its fit with the home. By enabling the school community to participate in identifying the values to be promoted by the school, and by subsequently maintaining the involvement of the whole community, the aspirations for the children become more consistent from classroom to classroom and between the classroom and home.

Maintaining the connections between school and home was accomplished by the good practice schools in a number of ways. Some invested considerable time and effort in a regular newsletter that sought to engage family members in the life of the school by explaining some of the details of the project, in particular the ethos the school was attempting to establish and the related aspirations it had for the children.

Some projects formed project coordinating groups comprised of teachers, parents and students and found that this strengthened connections with the community.

One of the clusters that experienced a very high rate of leadership and teaching staff turnover engaged parents to be a part of the leadership team. This was their way of addressing the sustainability of values education in their school communities.

Community engagement was of particular significance for cluster projects working with Indigenous communities. In these cases the different language and cultural views needed to be explored in a deep way before the school community could move forward with a common understanding.

Finally, some cluster schools also make the point that community engagement can, in itself, provide a source of enormous positive reinforcement not only for the values being promoted but also for the form of learning being encouraged and its outcomes. In one case, for example, students were required to present their project to a panel of community experts. In the process, they were forced to articulate their understanding of the values and to give accounts of how they were applying them,

thereby enabling students to develop their capacity to reflect, as well as their communicative competence.

### **Guiding principles for successfully implementing the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools***

The accumulated experience of the 160 schools attempting to implement VEGPSP – Stage 1 has revealed much about both the potential of values education and about how that potential might be realised. In general terms, the experience from VEGPSP – Stage 1 is that, in an ideal world, values education has considerable potential, among many other things, to help calm students and make them more attentive. It has the potential to encourage teachers to explore new and effective ways of working with their students. It can transform the quality of the interpersonal relationships in classrooms so that they are more highly attuned to the facilitation of learning. Indeed, there is some evidence from the project that effective values education programmes can be linked to improvements in students' academic performance. Of course, all of this is not the exclusive terrain of values education; nonetheless, it is a strong incentive for others to become involved in the values education enterprise or, as many in VEGPSP – Stage 1 describe it, the values education 'journey'. The principles set out below are offered as 'advice from experienced colleagues' to those who may be considering joining the journey. They are framed in a way that points to ways of moving the whole enterprise along – of continuing the journey, so to speak.

VEGPSP – Stage 1 cluster schools tackled the implementation of the National Framework from many angles which, of course, is by definition the approach suggested by the Framework. It is now well recognised as being 'a framework – not a cage'. The 'good practice' outlined above can nonetheless be synthesised into a set of general principles of 'good practice' for realising the potential of values education. Such principles reflect what has worked for the VEGPSP – Stage 1 in terms of successfully implementing the National Framework in ways that have had a significant impact on the quality of teaching and learning in each of the projects. We outline and discuss them here so that others who are considering taking the journey can build on the slowly accumulating practical accounts of what works.

There are at least nine things that seem to have been particularly important for the VEGPSP – Stage 1 schools' effective implementation of the National Framework.

#### ***1. Establishing a broad base of support for the enterprise within the school***

Most teachers recognise that values education is central to their daily work. They generally consider it to be implicit in most of the things they do with their classes. The challenge is to get values education to be a much more explicit aspect of teaching and learning. One way of approaching this is through discussions about the extent to which values education can have a calming effect on the children and on the school generally, discussions about the extent to which it can make children better self-managers, more reflective and more academically competent.

**2. *Coming to grips with 'the big picture' and working through it with a key colleague***

Through the DEST Values Education initiatives there is now an accumulated store of theoretical and practical material about how to make values central to the work of schools and about the positive effects that flow from that. Few, when they commenced their journey, were in such a strong and well-informed position. Rather their initial attempts were born of frustration about behaviour management issues or student disengagement issues and a desire to see them redressed. A more positive perspective is now available (which nonetheless has the potential to make students' response to school very positive). If the values education enterprise is to move on, someone (or a group) in the school considering joining the journey needs to get across this 'big picture'. There is a vast array of material in the *Values for Australian Schooling Kit* that was issued to all schools in June 2006. Similarly, there is additional material on the Internet at <http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values>.

**3. *Getting as many of the school community as possible to work together towards identifying the values that define the school's purpose and practices then publicly and visibly expressing them***

This usually requires a systematic and strategic approach. The example above from Modbury Primary School that is offered in the section Good Practice about Whole School Approaches points the way towards 'good practice' in that regard.

**4. *Developing a discourse or common language around both the values and around quality teaching***

It is a very real conundrum that the nine values in the National Framework are both 'agreed' and yet contested. Very few people are not prepared to stand by the values, but many disagree on their meaning. In most of the VEGPSP – Stage 1 cases, the need to reach agreement within the school community about the meaning of the values, and the language in which they are described, appears to be a precursor to successfully embedding these values in the policies and practices of the school. Most commonly with the VEGPSP – Stage 1 schools, this involved talking about the practical applications of the values that people wished to see or, in the case of quality teaching, how the values influenced relationships in the classroom.

**5. *Making values the centrepiece of the curriculum***

In the most successful VEGPSP – Stage 1 schools values are not seen as an 'add on', but rather as being intrinsic to all the school does. This was approached in many ways. In some schools it meant values education being integrated with the 'mainstream' curriculum rather than being seen as something separate to teach. So, in science for instance, opportunities for addressing values like 'responsibility' were taken by making it a very explicit part of a discussion, say, about global warming. English literature was approached from the perspective of, say, protagonists' ethics. Questions that were to be pursued using the inquiry method were phrased from a values perspective.

## ***6. Teaching the values in a staged way***

In many VEGPSP – Stage 1 schools teachers initially devoted considerable effort to teaching (in a formal, didactic sense) the values – what they ‘look like’, ‘sound like’ and ‘feel like’. This helps develop a common understanding about, and language for, the second stage for teaching the values during which the students (and teachers) put them into practice.

## ***7. Practising the values***

Because actions speak louder than words young people were given many opportunities in the most successful VEGPSP – Stage 1 schools to put their values into practice. Community service programmes and social action programmes were two common vehicles for doing this.

## ***8. Connecting the values education programme with things that already work well in the school***

The greatest successes were achieved when connections were made between values education and other initiatives and priorities of systems, sectors and schools. This helped to ensure that values education was not seen simply as additional to other priorities and work.

## ***9. Supporting the enterprise through a programme of lifelong professional learning***

Professional learning is critical at all stages of the process of implementing the National Framework, the initiating stage during which awareness is raised, the implementation stage during which the values education programme is put into practice and the reflection stage where practice is reviewed and plans are renewed. Some of the best professional learning comes from the sharing that schools and clusters are able to promote. If there is one consistent message from all 26 projects that are the subject of this report, it is about the value of sharing professional practice and the effect that has on raising confidence and improving teaching.

Clusters of schools can be an important source of professional development, learning and support. There is uniform agreement among the cluster schools about the extent to which professional learning contributes to best practice. According to some schools, from a purely utilitarian viewpoint, the promise of professional learning to accompany the implementation of the project can be very persuasive in getting people to participate. In terms of its impact on the quality of the cluster project, cluster schools make two main points. First, professional learning that takes the form of colleagues discussing issues about classroom practice and collaboratively working on practical ways of addressing them has greatest impact. However, the case studies of the VEGPSP – Stage 1 schools also make clear that teachers in the project do not always single-handedly manage to produce good practice. Many schools talk about the importance of using outside ‘experts’. Their value is at least twofold according to some best practice schools. On the one hand, they are sources of practical and

insightful material on values education and related things. On the other hand, they are frequently able to influence the school culture in ways 'insiders' find difficult, and consequently can get things happening.

## The Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 1 Cluster Schools

Lead school	Cluster Schools	Project focus
Airds High School NSW	Briar Road Public School Bradbury Public School Woodlands Road Public School John Warby Public School	Identification of core values to then reinforce/develop them
Birrigai Outdoor School ACT	Birrigai Outdoor School	Empowering students through cultural experiences to teach others
Brighton Secondary College VIC	Brighton Primary School Gardenvale Primary School Brighton Beach Primary School Elsternwick Primary School Bentleigh West Primary School Berendale School	Integrating values education to the middle years in all key learning areas
Calwell High School ACT	Isabella Plains Primary School Richardson Primary School Theodore Primary School Calwell Primary School	Development of K-10 curriculum to support emotional literacy
Canterbury College Qld	St Hilda's School Marsden State High School Loganlea State High School	Pedagogy of service learning in the middle years
Chapel Hill State School Qld	Kernmore South State School Fig Tree Pocket State School Upper Brookfield State School Kenmore State High School Brookfield Primary School Glenleighden School Mount Crosby State School	Develop and embed values education in the policies and practices of the schools
Domremy College	Bethlehem College	'A sense of the sacred'

NSW	Holy Spirit College Casimir Catholic College De La Salle College	curriculum units
Hackham West Primary School SA	Hackham South Primary School Christies Beach Primary School Port Noarlunga Primary School Christie Downs Primary School	Embed restorative practices in the ethos and operations of the schools
Heights College Qld	Bundaberg Christian College Emerald Christian College Mackay Christian College Calvary Christian College	K-12 character framework
Henbury School NT	Stuart Park Primary School Wanguri Primary School Anula Primary School Batchelor Area School Wallace Rockhole School Humpty Doo Primary School	Explicit teaching of social skills, teamwork, etc through TRIBES
Lance Holt School WA	Strelley Community School Moerlina School Kerry Street Community School Nyindamurra Family School of Creativity	Attachment to place and active citizenship
Lightning Ridge Central School NSW	Enngonia Public School Bourke High School Goodooga Central School Nyngan Central School	Defining agreed community values leading to units of work
Longford Primary School Tas	Bracknell Primary School Campbell Town District High School Cressy District High School Evandale Primary School Hagley farm Primary School	Raising awareness of national values framework and embedding it in schools

	Perth Primary School	
Merrylands High School NSW	Sherwood Grange Public School Merrylands East Public School Merrylands Public School Guildford West Public School Hilltop Road Public School Guildford Public School	A community approach to promoting VE, including home-school consistency
Modbury School R-7 SA	Salisbury High School Para Vista Primary School St Augustine's Parish School St Columba College Penola Primary School	Pedagogy to support VE, resilience, higher order thinking and citizenship
Mooroolbark Heights Secondary College Vic	Kilsyth Primary School Manchester Primary School Bimbadeen Heights Primary School Mooroolbark East Primary School	Engaging students in living their values in the community (through projects)
Nerang State School Qld	Worongary State School William Duncan State School Beechmont State School Gilston State School Numinbah Valley State School Numinbah Valley Environmental Education Centre Nerang State School	Teaching VE through social literacy to improve resilience and social capital
Norwood Secondary College Vic	Croydon Hills Primary School Mullum Primary School Kalinda Primary School Parkwood Secondary College Park Orchards Primary School	Promoting relational learning through values education

	Warranwood Primary School Wonga Park Primary School Yarra Road Primary School	
Oxenford State School Qld	Upper Coomera State College Bellvue Park State School Southport State High School	Implementing philosophy in the classroom aligned to national values
Sacred Heart Primary School NT	St Paul's Primary School St Francis Xavier Xavier Community Education Centre Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School St Joseph's College St Mary's Primary School St John's College St Francis of Assisi Holy Family Primary School	Training teachers in TRIBES and building their capacity
Spearwood Primary School WA	South Coogee Primary School Hamilton Senior High School Jandakot Primary School Coogee Primary School Phoenix Primary School Coolbellup Primary School Newton Primary School	Building values-based and inclusive school communities
St. Charles Borromeo Primary School Vic	St Gregory the Great Primary School Our Lady of the Pines School St Kevin's School Saints Peter and Paul's School St Clement of Rome School	Implementing a whole school approach through student action teams
St. Peter's College	Mercy College	Embedding VE in the school's policies, teaching and practices

NSW	St Philip Neri School Our Lady of Good Counsel School St Cecilia's School Our Lady of the Rosary Primary School St Brendan's Primary School St Martin de Porres School	
The Don College Tas	Newstead College Hellyer College Claremont College Hobart College	Youth leadership and citizenship capacity building
Townsville Central State School Qld	Magnetic Island State School Garbutt State School Townsville West State School Railway Estate State School Oonooba State School Belgian Gardens State School	Dissemination of Peer Leaders – Catch the Spirit programme
Werribee Secondary College Vic	Iramoo Primary School Thomas Chirnside Primary School Werribee Primary School	Learning how to be – values for learning and life