



An Australian Government Initiative

**Giving Voice to the Impacts
of Values Education**
The Final Report of the Values
in Action Schools Project

October 2010



Education
Services
Australia



An Australian Government Initiative

**Giving Voice to the Impacts
of Values Education**
The Final Report of the Values
in Action Schools Project

October 2010



Education
Services
Australia



An Australian Government Initiative

*Giving Voice to the Impacts of Values Education:
The Final Report of the Values in Action Schools Project*

ISBN: 978 1 74200 118 0

SCIS order number: 1468301

Full bibliographic details are available from Education Services Australia.

Published by Education Services Australia Ltd

PO Box 177 Carlton South Vic 3053 Australia

Tel: (03) 9207 9600

Fax: (03) 9910 9800

Email: info@esa.edu.au

Website: www.esa.edu.au

© Commonwealth of Australia 2010

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the Commonwealth. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Attorney General's Department, Robert Garran Offices, National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600 or posted at www.ag.gov.au/cca

The views expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Edited by Barbara Vaughan

Designed by Deanna Vener

Printed in Australia by GEON Impact Printing Pty Ltd

Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
Executive summary	1
Background	1
Introducing the Values in Action Schools Project	2
The purpose of the Values in Action Schools Project	3
Project methods	3
Project activity	4
Key impacts from the Values in Action Schools Project	5
Conclusion	10
Section 1 Looking for the impacts of values education	13
Background	14
On the matter of method	16
Most Significant Change stories	23
Section 2 Impacts of the Values in Action Schools Project	37
Participatory analysis	38
Secondary analysis	38
Impact 1: Values consciousness	39
Impact 2: Wellbeing	49
Impact 3: Agency	53
Impact 4: Connectedness	60
Impact 5: Transformation	68
Section 3 Accounts of the VASP cluster projects	75
Section 4 Appendices	119
Appendix 1: Background to the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project	120
Appendix 2: The management and operation of the Values in Action Schools Project	123
Appendix 3: The Values in Action Schools Project clusters	126
Appendix 4: The Values in Action Schools Project University Advisors	128
Appendix 5: Values Education Project Advisory Committee	129
Appendix 6: Teacher survey demographic data	130
Appendix 7: References and further reading	133

Acknowledgements

The Values in Action Schools Project was funded and commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. *Giving Voice to the Impacts of Values Education: The Final Report of the Values in Action Schools Project* provides an account of the project and its outcomes. The views expressed in the report do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Education Services Australia gratefully acknowledges the work of the cluster schools and their communities, the professional contributions of the University Advisors, the support of the State and Territory Values Education Contact Officers and the guidance of the Values Education Project Advisory Committee.

The artworks and work samples reproduced in this report are drawn from the Values in Action Schools Project cluster project activity and from student participation in the Evaluation Summit student art activity. Education Services Australia thanks students and their parents/guardians for permission to reproduce these works.

Project Director

Mr David Brown, Senior Project Manager,
Education Services Australia

Project Managers

Dr Jenny Wajsenberg, Education Services Australia

Ms Jane Weston, Education Services Australia

Academic consultant and researcher

Dr Julie Hamston

Authors

Giving Voice to the Impacts of Values Education: The Final Report of the Values in Action Schools Project was written by Dr Julie Hamston, Ms Jane Weston, Dr Jenny Wajsenberg and Mr David Brown.

Executive summary

Education equips young people with the knowledge, understanding, skills and values to take advantage of opportunity and to face the challenges of this [global] era with confidence.

As well as knowledge and skills, a school's legacy to young people should include national values of democracy, equity and justice, and participation in Australia's civic life.

...[students need to develop] personal values and attributes such as honesty, resilience, respect and empathy for others [which help them] establish and maintain healthy and satisfying lives.

Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA 2008)

Background

It was a powerful and poignant coincidence. On Wednesday 10 December 2008 the teachers, academics, education systems officers and project managers of the Values in Action Schools Project (VASP) met in Melbourne for the first time. They had gathered at their first briefing session to commence work on new values education projects that set out to deepen our understanding of the impacts of values education in Australian schooling. Two days later, on Friday 12 December 2008, the Australian Education Ministers formally released a new national declaration on their aspirations for young Australians for the next decade and beyond.

The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA 2008) succeeded the Hobart and Adelaide Declarations on goals of schooling (Australian Education Council 1989; 1999). It focuses on the needs of all young Australians in the 21st century. As well as setting equity and excellence in school education as the number one national goal, the *Melbourne Declaration* emphasises the importance for young Australians to develop

personal values and attributes such as honesty, resilience, empathy and respect for others. The Values in Action Schools Project was embarking on an educational journey of national significance, an exploration of potential value to all Australian schools as they worked towards those aspirational goals set out in the *Melbourne Declaration*. This Final Report is an account of what the project has achieved and what it can tell school communities about educating young Australians in the values and attributes needed to establish and maintain healthy and satisfying lives.

The task is not new. The importance of values in developing confident, ethical, resilient and successful learners has underpinned goals for Australian schooling in both implicit and explicit language for many years. However, the role of schooling in the values education of young Australians has been a contentious and contested issue. Since 2002 the Australian Government has made a concerted effort to fund and foster a range of activities to support schools in developing explicit, informed, systematic and effective approaches to values education in all areas of school policy and classroom practice.

The Australian Government's commitment has provided Australian school systems and school communities with the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* (DEST 2005); a series of national forums and conferences for



sharing professional expertise; partnership projects with parents, principals and teacher educators; teaching and learning advice; curriculum and professional learning materials; and a strong research base. Collectively these comprise a compelling foundation to support improved school practice and outcomes in this difficult domain of school education.

Introducing the Values in Action Schools Project

The Values in Action Schools Project is a schools-based element of the corpus of values work. The VASP was initiated in 2008 as part of a broader Australian Government values education program, and conducted by Education Services Australia on behalf of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). The VASP was designed to supplement and extend the work of the previous two stages of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project (VEGPSP) funded by the Australian Government following the release of the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* in 2005 (DEST).

Stage 1 of the VEGPSP (conducted between May 2005 and April 2006) and Stage 2 (conducted between October 2006 and April 2008) involved 309 schools working in 51 clusters from around Australia. Clusters were funded to design, implement and report on purpose-built action research projects in values education that applied the *National Framework* in local contexts. The overall project goal was to use the school experiences to discern, articulate and disseminate good practice in values education for all Australian schools.

The then Curriculum Corporation¹ managed Stages 1 and 2 of the VEGPSP, gathered local data from each school cluster and provided final reports to the Australian Government. This data included teacher reflections, student case studies, attendance and critical incident data, and the reflections

of University Advisors attached to each cluster project. The Final Report of Stage 1, *Implementing the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* (Curriculum Corporation 2006), was able to identify and assert ten 'inferences' about the nature of good practice in effective values education from the activity in the Stage 1 cluster projects. The Stage 2 project clusters tested and extended the findings from Stage 1. The Final Report of Stage 2, *At the Heart of What We Do: Values Education at the Centre of Schooling* (Curriculum Corporation 2008), provided more confident, more refined and more assertive claims that there were ten 'principles of good practice' evident in the work of the Stage 2 project clusters. Again, the data sources informing the findings in the report were largely local data sets, including case studies, teacher reflection on changed teaching practice, and observed changes in student outcomes.

The VASP constitutes the third iteration of the VEGPSP. It builds upon the work previously undertaken by funded project schools since the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* was adopted by all Australian Education Ministers in 2005. This Final Report presents an evaluation of the impact of the VASP on teachers, students and parents.



¹ Education Services Australia Limited was established on 1 March 2010 through the merger of Curriculum Corporation and Education.au Limited.

The purpose of the Values in Action Schools Project

The core purpose of the VASP was to further develop the evidence base for informing improved school policy and practice in values education.

The project was to build on the work of Stages 1 and 2 of the VEGPSP, and to explore additional evidence of impacts that result from effective values education practice. More specifically, the aims of the project were to:

- explore linkages between values education and student wellbeing, positive education, and other relevant learning areas
- focus on curriculum and student-centred learning approaches to values education
- develop approaches to improving teacher professional learning and increasing parental engagement
- capture and disseminate valuable and practical information from clusters to the broader education community
- collect relevant information, feedback and evidence that is of the highest possible value to the professional learning of teachers in Australian schools.

In October 2008 an invitation and guidelines were sent to all Australian schools inviting them to form clusters (3 to 10 schools) and apply for funding of up to \$54,000 to conduct relevant values education projects. After a three-stage evaluation and selection process, 15 cluster projects were nominated for funding from 140 compliant applications. Successful applicants were invited to gather in Melbourne on 10 December 2008 for a briefing session to induct cluster representatives into the project and introduce its methodologies.

Project methods

The VASP built on the previous two school-based values projects in that an ongoing action research cycle drove activity at the local cluster level and cluster reporting was to provide a means of

gathering qualitative data about local project outcomes.

However, after reviewing the project methodologies used in Stages 1 and 2 of the VEGPSP, 'story' emerged as a powerful and compelling aspect of the evidence gathering. Cluster Coordinators had reported using 'story' to drive positive change and sustain their values initiatives. In addition, as the values conversation across the nation grew through conferences, the publication of monographs, commissioned quantitative research and expanded professional development activity, it became apparent that data on teachers' perceptions of their role as values educators was both of interest and a key determinant of successful project implementation.

These developments informed a different design for the VASP. In addition to the tools used in Stages 1 and 2, such as iterative cluster project reports, local schools data and University Advisors' reports, the VASP project methodology combined highly structured qualitative and all-of-cluster quantitative methods to identify project impacts.

The key qualitative data-gathering tool applied in all clusters was the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique (Davies & Dart 2005).² The MSC technique is a qualitative and participatory research method useful for monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of social research and social change projects. It draws on participants' experiences and perceptions to provide narrative testaments of participant-based change experienced in response to an intervention.

MSC is a powerful tool for monitoring, evaluation and organisational learning. The technique goes beyond merely capturing and documenting participants' stories of impact; it offers a means of engaging in effective dialogue. Each story represents the storyteller's interpretation of impact, which is then reviewed and discussed with other participants. The process offers an opportunity for a diverse range of stakeholders to enter into a dialogue about program intention, the impact of

² For a comprehensive guide to the Most Significant Change technique, see Davies and Dart (2005).

interventions and, ultimately, future directions. When applied in school contexts with groups of parents, teachers and students, the technique offered the potential to deliver rich and diverse responses and to identify any themes or patterns in the impacts.

The MSC technique was introduced to clusters at the beginning of the project and was administered towards the end of cluster project activity. The project participants generated more than 200 stories of significant change from their values education projects. The stories came from teachers, students and parents. Twelve or more stories from each cluster were recorded and presented back to the cluster as transcripts. Participants at the local level then reviewed, discussed and selected four stories of most significant change from their project. That resulted in 60 stories demonstrating the most significant change. From these 60, another panel process selected a final 14 stories, which were deemed to show the most significant change

of all the project stories. These were then shared at the national Evaluation Summit held for VASP participants in Melbourne, October 2009. Here, mixed groups of participants from the projects read and reflected on each of the stories to make a further final selection of six. These six stories appear in the pages that follow. Because of the primacy of 'story' in assessing the impact of values interventions, this Final Report presents these six stories of most significant change as key impact data. The 'voices' from the entire collection of MSC stories also appear throughout the report and reflect the perceptions of key project stakeholders.

A quantitative data set, comprising teacher perception surveys, captured teachers' perceptions about their role in values education before and after the enactment of values projects. The post-project survey also gave participating teachers the opportunity to reflect on how using values-rich teaching approaches had affected their professional practice.

Finally, as in Stages 1 and 2 of the VEGPSP, each cluster project provided an iterative project report to Education Services Australia, which gave an account of project activity at all sites in the cluster and provided a range of data relating to their projects. These data included student work samples and artefacts, student survey data, attendance and other school environment data, as well as teacher observations and school newsletters. Cluster reports were further supplemented by observation reports from each cluster's University Advisor. All of these data sources were subject to review and analysis and are reflected in the account of project impacts in Section 3 of this report.

Project activity

The VASP constitutes the third and final stage of the VEGPSP. It was conducted between December 2008 and November 2009 and ultimately involved 86 schools working in 15 clusters (of 3 to 10 schools). The schools were located in urban, regional, rural and remote areas across Australia and there were clusters that included a mix of



primary and secondary schools, and intersectoral and intercultural settings. Some of these clusters had participated in Stages 1 and 2 of the VEGPSP and were building further on their previous work in values education; others were initiating values education activity. Most were providing new school contexts in which to explore the impacts of values education implementation.

The role of the clusters was to design, implement, evaluate and report on targeted and directed projects that met local needs. Clusters focused on designated special interest areas such as student wellbeing, resilience and positive education, social inclusion, service learning, improving academic outcomes, civics and citizenship, and Indigenous, interfaith and intercultural approaches. (Full descriptions of the cluster projects are included in Section 4 of this report; see also Appendix 3.)

All clusters were introduced to the good practice approaches to values education identified in Stages 1 and 2 of the VEGPSP, and were encouraged to adopt them in their projects. In particular, VASP clusters were encouraged to consider the ten principles of good practice that emerged from Stages 1 and 2. These are described in *At the Heart of What We Do: Values Education at the Centre of Schooling – The Final Report of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project – Stage 2*, (Curriculum Corporation 2008). The principles are:

1. Establish and consistently use a common and shared values language across the school.
2. Use pedagogies that are values-focused and student-centred within all curriculum.
3. Develop values education as an integrated curriculum concept, rather than as a program, an event or an addition to the curriculum.
4. Explicitly teach values so that students know what the values mean and how the values are lived.
5. Implicitly model values and explicitly foster the modelling of values.
6. Develop relevant and engaging values approaches connected to local and global

contexts and which offer real opportunity for student agency.

7. Use values education to consciously foster intercultural understanding, social cohesion and social inclusion.
8. Provide teachers with informed, sustained and targeted professional learning and foster their professional collaborations.
9. Encourage teachers to take risks in their approaches to values education.
10. Gather and monitor data for continuous improvement in values education.

Key impacts from the Values in Action Schools Project

VASP has once again confirmed my strong belief that values education, both explicit and implicit, must underpin all we do in our schools.
(Teacher reflection, post-project survey)

Five key and interrelated impacts of the VASP have been identified from the participatory analysis provided through the Most Significant Change technique and secondary analysis of the other project data. They are:

1. Values consciousness
2. Wellbeing
3. Agency
4. Connectedness
5. Transformation

Elaborations and the evidence relating to each of these impacts can be found in Section 2 of this report.

Impact 1: Values consciousness

An important impact of the values projects on students, teachers and parents was an increased consciousness of the meaning of values and the power of values education to transform learning and life. This heightened awareness presented as a knowing or consciousness that transcends a superficial understanding of values disconnected

from action. Evidence gathered from all clusters indicates that this increased awareness of values and values education was developed through various forms of reflection, dialogue and communication, and personal story.

Across the 15 cluster projects, many teachers were able to think deeply about their teaching and the values they modelled in and outside the classroom, their students' growing awareness of values, and their own values. A new, renewed or affirmed values consciousness was also evident in teacher perceptions after the enactment of values education projects.

The development of students' awareness of values and action was supported through the many entry points they had into values education across the clusters, including youth forums, forums on social issues such as poverty, outreach programs, values summits, values expos, arts-based performances and exhibitions, virtual communication, storytelling, literature studies, and inquiries into Asian religions and human rights. Students reported on how a values consciousness had impacted on their actions. Some enthused about the feelings of self-worth, happiness and wellbeing that came from giving to others.

It is perhaps not surprising then that many of the teachers' reflections on the impact of the VASP focused on students' potential and their capacity to demonstrate the kind of thinking, creativity, ethical and intercultural understanding, and social competence advocated in the design for a 21st century Australian Curriculum by the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACARA 2009, pp 12–14). Teachers spoke of being 'heartened' by the fact that students hold strong values and are interested in exploring these in a range of contexts.

The development of a values consciousness was also enhanced through the many opportunities for dialogue and communication provided across the clusters. In addition to the dialogue that took place between teachers and students in the classroom, communication around values was established between teachers and parents, and parents and

their children. In some schools this was formalised through newsletters, parent and community forums, artistic performances, values homework, philosophical 'chewies' or 'big' questions, surveys and interviews. These forms of communication not only helped to establish a relationship between teachers and parents regarding students' values education, but afforded parents time and opportunity to reflect on their own values.

Personal stories also played a central role in embedding values consciousness in many of the cluster schools and communities. In addition to the MSC stories, through which participants reflected on the outcomes of the values projects, the exchange of personal stories formed an important part of student learning.

Impact 2: Wellbeing

The second impact of the VASP was that values education improved student wellbeing. This is an important outcome, as research has shown that the social and emotional wellbeing of Australian students decreases from primary to secondary school (Bernard, Stephanou & Urbach 2007). International research conducted by UNICEF (2007) has described the 'changing ecology of childhood' (p 39), whereby the lives of young people in developed countries, such as Australia, are shaped by forces that do not necessarily assist them to learn and apply values that optimise their personal lives and the pro-social behaviours important in navigating the complexity of the contemporary, global world (see Fraillon 2005). The sustained improvement in student wellbeing forms part of the Australian Government's Social Inclusion agenda (DEEWR 2010).

A range of evidence supports the impact of values education on improved student wellbeing, most especially the voices of the students themselves. These voices attest to a process of self-discovery and recall the important relationship between values and wellbeing described by Hill (2004, p 18). He asserts that all human beings are driven to make sense of social reality, and so attention must be paid to the goals and values that give meaning to their

lives and reasons for them to participate fully in life. Many VASP clusters reported on improvements in student wellbeing as a result of their action projects, identifying student wellbeing as an area of strategic importance in the future.

The evidence indicates that student wellbeing was enhanced through the application of values-focused and student-centred pedagogies, which allowed students to reflect deeply on the nature of values and what these mean to them and others. Examples from the clusters of these pedagogies include activities such as silent sitting, reflective writing, multimedia production, drama performance and poetry writing. Through these activities, teachers provided a values framework to support wellbeing (see Hill 2004) and raised students' awareness of the importance of values in their own and others' lives. In thinking about, acting on and feeling values, students developed feelings of self-worth, empathy, responsible personal behaviour and engagement.

The process of self-discovery and self-knowing is important to all students, but findings from the VASP suggest that this is especially the case for students who are 'at risk', marginalised or disadvantaged.

There is also evidence that shows changes in students' understanding of the impact of their actions on the wellbeing of others. This evidence supports other research that suggests that to understand student social and emotional wellbeing it is important for others to understand their internal world (Bernard, Stephanou & Urbach 2007; see Fraillon 2005). The mutuality of this understanding is reflected in this comment: 'The project allowed everyone [students and teachers] to look inside themselves and really work out what they value, who they are' (Teacher reflection, University Advisor's report, Beenleigh Cluster).

While primarily focused on the wellbeing of students, there is compelling evidence in the VASP that wellbeing impacts were experienced by teachers, parents and families, and in classroom and whole school environments.

Impact 3: Agency

An important impact of the VASP on students, as facilitated by teachers and supported by parents, was the development of various forms of agency. Agency refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make choices and act on them. In this way the outcomes of the VASP align with the Educational Goals for Young Australians, outlined in the *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEETYA 2008), which aim for schools and communities to assist students to become active and informed citizens; to play an active role in their own learning; to participate in Australian civic life and work for the common good; and to become responsible local and global citizens.

The evidence of strengthened student agency in the outcomes of the VASP also resonates with Sandel's (2009) view that values are learnt and acted upon in communities for the 'common good', whereby moral and ethical integrity help to develop social cohesion and solidarity. Working for the common good involves students in what Noddings (1992) describes as an 'ethics of care', often developed through engagement with complex global issues (see Noddings 2006). This outcome of the VASP highlights the importance of values education programs involving various forms of giving, outreach, community development and service learning.

Evidence from the VASP indicates that student agency was facilitated through meaningful engagement in community projects; opportunities for the development of student voice, initiative and leadership; and an explicit focus on ethical, intercultural and social issues.

Across the clusters, many students were engaged in authentic community projects that allowed them to enact their values and to reflect on the different ways they may have contributed to the 'common good'. Examples of this include service learning and outreach projects, incorporating voluntary community work such as 'meals on wheels'; hospitality programs; leadership and mentoring programs; fundraising projects and aid projects such as 'Mini Vinnies'; random acts of kindness activities; and community promotion projects.

These projects complement the comprehensive review of service and community learning provided by Lovat et al (2009a, pp 32–38) in that each project involved students in experiences that aimed to benefit members of the wider community beyond the classroom and involved students in structured reflection on their experience and learning.

This real-life experiential learning, which connects students' actions, thoughts and feelings (after Dewey 1963), appeared to generate a deep understanding of 'self and other', and so builds upon Stage 2 of the VEGPSP, where findings demonstrated the significant values learning for students in projects that are 'deeply personal, deeply real and deeply engaging' (Curriculum Corporation 2008, p 40).

Evidence of the impact of the VASP on student agency was also found in reflective comments from teachers. Across the clusters, this perception of an increased student agency was raised in the context of teachers designing real-life experiences that facilitated student agency. As a result of their participation in the VASP, teachers had a deeper understanding of the significance of values learning in contexts that are meaningful to students. Teachers spoke about developing more positive and open relationships with students, which allowed them to more effectively 'notice' students and what they do.

This finding echoes other research that asserts that student agency is supported through a teacher agency developed and enhanced through professional learning programs such as the VASP (see Deakin Crick et al 2005). In recognising the significance of connecting values education to students' lives, it is important for teachers to reflect on how best the whole school community can facilitate this kind of learning. The findings relate to the case studies of student agency reported in the VEGPSP Stage 2 report (Curriculum Corporation 2008) and confirm that students need to feel safe and supported in their values learning, not least because of the emotional learning experiences they encounter.

Impact 4: Connectedness

The impact of the VASP on positive and wide-ranging connections made between teachers, students and parents extends the findings of Stage 2 of the VEGPSP and identifies a clear and positive direction for schools. The relationships forged between students, teachers and parents in many of the clusters supported student engagement in learning; improved parent engagement in their children's learning; and allowed teachers to develop new relationships with their students, each other and the parents and families in their school community.

This impact of the VASP illustrates Wenger's (1998, 2006) concept of communities of practice. Wenger views communities of practice as groups of people who share a concern and passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. The elements of a community of practice include:

- shared domains of interest (in this case, values in action)
- community, whereby members build relationships and learn from each other (students, teachers and parents)
- practice, where members of the community share experiences and stories (eg MSC stories, wiki posts, online forums)
- resources (eg assessment rubrics, community events and displays, values-based language)
- tools (eg web links, forums, surveys, newsletters).

Evidence from the VASP indicates that better connections between students, teachers and parents were developed through shared goals and practices for values education; the development of mutual feelings of respect, trust and safety; and varied opportunities for collaboration.

Many clusters reported on the power of the partnerships that were developed through the VASP and the impetus for values education derived from goals and practices shared between the school and the home. Examples of these collaborative partnerships between schools and families include parent and community forums, storytelling by

elders in the community, collaborative assessment tasks, surveys, interviews, community displays, celebration evenings and web links.

In light of efforts to build connections across the school and wider community, some reports attest to parents being 'grateful' for the opportunity to support their child in values-based work at home, or speak of the 'huge enthusiasm and desire' of parents to be involved at a deeper level in their child's values education with the school (Teacher reflections, post-project survey).

The communities of practice (Wenger 1998, 2006) established around the VASP facilitated mutual feelings of respect, trust, compassion and safety. There were many reports of improved and stronger relationships between teachers, students and parents. These groups spoke of improved relationships in the classroom, school and home; noticeable improvements in respectful behaviours; opportunities to share thoughts and feelings in environments that were safe and built on trust; greater understanding of others; and the support that comes for values education when everyone works together.

It is worth noting that the nature of the relationships established between members of the different communities of practice through the VASP, as revealed in both qualitative and quantitative data, both confirm and contrast with the findings of Lovat et al (2009b) in their report to the Australian Government on the impact of values education on student effects and school ambience. The connections built through many of the VASP projects exemplify the quality outcomes for students, teachers and parents that arise from community engagement. This is particularly the case for the relationships established between teachers and parents.

Impact 5: Transformation

Change and transformation was the heart of the VASP in that all clusters implemented their values projects using an action research cycle, and were encouraged to apply the principles of good practice

in values education (Curriculum Corporation 2008). Teachers and students were urged to engage in continuous reflection on the action they implemented in their schools (Schön 1983).

This systematic reflection on the actions taken by various stakeholders was incorporated into the VASP through the MSC stories and the Evaluation Summit; the briefing sessions; pre- and post-project surveys; mid-project and final reports on the VASP; and the analysis of different forms of evidence to illustrate impacts. It is worth emphasising the unique contribution the VASP makes to reflective practice in values education, both through these reflection activities and the inclusion of the reflections of parents and students in the evaluation of project impacts.

Evidence indicates that these transformations were supported through the momentum and opportunities for change provided through the values projects. The transformations reported by clusters centred around changes in the professional practice as well as personal attitudes, behaviours, relationships and group dynamics. Transformations were experienced and observed by teachers, students and parents alike.

There is widespread evidence across all the data sources of the 'ripple effect' of the values projects and the momentum created for widespread professional and personal change. In particular, the MSC stories and the reflective comments included with the post-project survey provide valuable insights into teachers' perceptions of this change.

Reflections from teachers point to profound transformations in student learning. Teachers described students' 'deeper understanding' of 'complex issues' – how children 'can take on sophisticated concepts when they are explicitly taught' and change 'their attitude and perception of [a] value'. In turn, teachers wrote of being encouraged to 'continue exploring complex issues and values with students'.

Students and parents likewise told stories of personal change and shared their observations of noticeable changes in others. One student described

how the class had 'evolved' and said that values have 'helped us become more mature, adjusted kids and it's a great thing to have in your older life and it will help you make friends with people and get along' (Student MSC story, Tasmanian Values Cluster).

The findings described here in relation to the impact of transformation resonate with Fullan's (1999) argument that reform in schools must fundamentally involve making a difference to the lives of young people. Within his comprehensive research and scholarship on change in schools and systems, Fullan (2001) asks educators to reflect on what would happen if (teachers) valued students' opinions and what would happen if schools involved the parent community in students' learning. The VASP has shown that profound professional and personal transformation can result when these questions are addressed and that all stakeholders in values education may, as Fullan urges, find meaning in action and change.

Conclusion

The impacts identified in the Values in Action Schools Project attest to how a systematic and planned approach to values education can improve students' engagement with schooling and promote better learning outcomes, and enhance their social and emotional wellbeing. In addition, the VASP demonstrates, through the voices of the participants themselves, how values education can transform classrooms, relationships, school environments, teacher professional practice and parents' engagement in their children's schooling.

These are significant outcomes for all Australian schools. Together with Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project, the VASP has made a major contribution to our understanding of what good values education is, how it can be implemented and what sorts of difference it can make for students, teachers and whole school communities. The VASP has effectively built on the previous VEGPSP work and added in a unique way to the compelling body of evidence about the impacts of values education. The evidence

has come directly from the voices of the hundreds of VASP project participants in the 15 clusters. These voices, together with the voices from the other 166 schools of Stage 1 and the 143 schools from Stage 2, form a chorus of testimony to the fact that values education, when given the time, focus and application of the good practice principles identified in VEGPSP, can yield profound outcomes for school communities.

This Final Report on the Values in Action Schools Project attempts to capture the essence of what the 15 project clusters have achieved. By its nature, the report cannot do justice to all the rich work that has taken place. Nor does it pretend that the outcomes have been uniform across the diverse school and cluster contexts. The report acknowledges the many tribulations, frustrations, false starts, disappointments and uncertainties that a number of projects experienced. While not all clusters succeeded to the extent they may have wanted in the short time available for their projects, it is equally true to note that all clusters attest to a significant learning about values education that will be of continuing benefit to their communities.

On behalf of the wider Australian education community, the VASP project managers wish to acknowledge the efforts of the hundreds of teachers, principals, students and parents as well as the numerous academics and education system officers who have contributed to the VASP work and the outcomes described in this report. We thank them for their work, their generous sharing, their insights and their many different contributions that have extended our knowledge and understanding of how values education can impact on the schooling experience.

The VASP provides all Australian schools and the entire education community with additional insights and more evidence of how values education can contribute to the whole purpose of schooling and how it so well serves the goals for schooling as expressed in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA 2008).

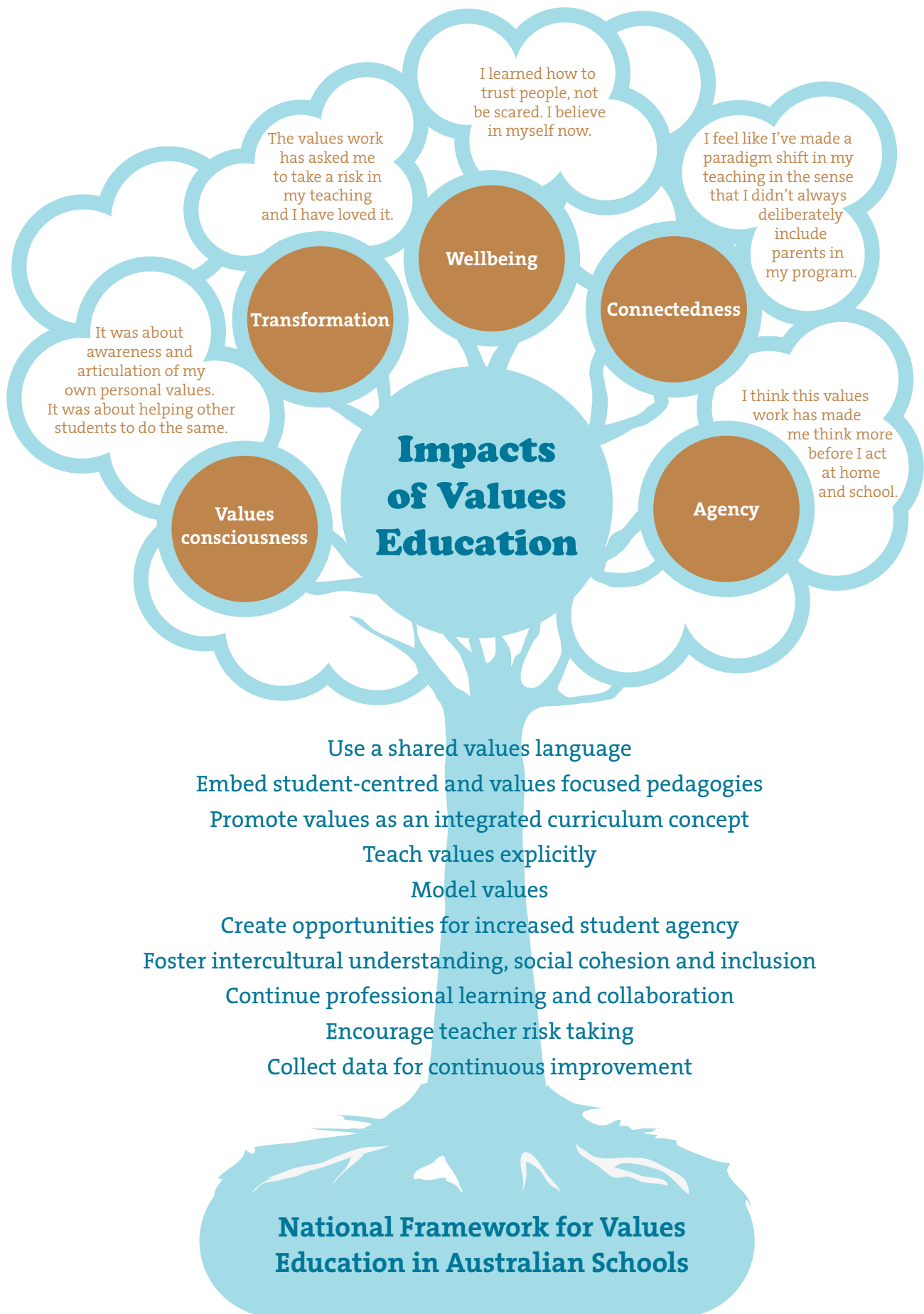


Figure 1: Growth and impacts of the Australian values education initiative 2005–2009

