Values Pedagogy and Student Achievement
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Preface

Many of the assumptions around good practice pedagogy are being reassessed in our time. Under the weight of a combination of forces, many of the older paradigms of learning are being questioned. These forces include the greater pressure around matters of intercultural exchange and the consequent weakening of ethnocentrically determined views about knowledge, teaching and learning. Hence, in an era that sees Western education increasingly influenced by the movement of peoples from non-Western regimes, many of the philosophical assumptions that have impelled pedagogical approaches over the past century are now under scrutiny. The forces also relate to new scientific understandings about the processes of learning. In particular, emerging insights from the neurosciences cast shadows of doubt on many of the dominant twentieth-century developmental theories and allied pedagogical practices, rendering them with more than an appearance of inadequacy to the task of educating students in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, philosophical work has continued to question the increasing trend towards instrumentality in education, reducing its purpose and goals to measurable outcomes that are less suited than ever to the diverse populations being served. In spite of the pompous claims made about them, such instrumentality actually undermines student achievement and, in turn, the true power of education to transform the life chances of the populations it is meant to serve. Hence, the inevitable conclusion is drawn that failure is at least as much a systemic as a personal issue.

Among the updated research that elicits such critique is that which deals directly with effective pedagogy, clearly illustrating the enhanced effects on learning when it is dealt with as a holistic developmental enterprise rather than one concerned solely with content, technique and measurable outcomes. This research includes volumes of empirical evidence and conceptual analysis from across the globe that point to the inextricability of values as lying at the heart of those forms of good practice pedagogy that support and facilitate the species of student achievement that truly does transform the life chances of students. In this book, we will explore
and uncover those volumes of evidence and analysis, illustrating their pertinence to 
student achievement, the vexed issue that lies at the heart of all for which education 
stands.

27 July 2011
Newcastle, Australia

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Overturning Old Paradigms

Educational research of the 1990s and beyond has challenged earlier conceptions concerned with the alleged incapacity of teachers, and formal education generally, to make a difference in the lives of students. Decades of experimental research simply served to confirm the view that the destiny of a student was predominantly fixed by heritage and/or environment and that what was left of mediating factors related more to peer pressure, media influence and disability constraints than to the impacting power of teachers and schools. Countless studies were conducted by eminent figures such as the revered Talcott Parsons, which merely served to reinforce the fundamental belief that families were “…factories which produce human personality” (Parsons and Bales 1955, p. 16). Against the potency of the family’s formative power, all else paled to insignificance according to such research findings, leading Christopher Jencks to conclude that “…the character of a school’s output depends largely on a single input, namely the characteristics of the entering children.” (Jencks 1972, p. 256).

This pessimistic view about the capacity of teachers and schools to impact significantly on student achievement impelled a growing view throughout the twentieth century, albeit one largely denied by educational systems and their political masters, that the role of schooling was limited to enhancing the chances of those who already possessed social capital while minimizing the damage to those in deficit. Such a view was strengthened by research of the kind above that seemed to confirm the helplessness of teachers and schools to influence the life chances of those who came to school with existing deficits. While directed largely at academic achievement, pessimism about the potential for teachers and schools to play a larger role in building capacity in students’ social, emotional and moral lives was even more profound, with the same research seeming to underline the futility of such postulations. In turn, this provided substantiation for a belief implicit in public systems that the only ethical stance for teachers and schools to take around the issue of values was one of values-neutrality, again a view fortified by research that seemed to indicate that a values-filled orientation would have been doomed anyway.
Much of the largely replicable and descriptive research that formed this pessimistic view of student potential has been gradually supplanted by bolder and more interventionist forms of research designed to push the boundaries of earlier beliefs. Instead of setting out to ‘prove’ what hardly needed proving, namely that those in good health and with a heritage of achievement were in an advantaged position on entering the school, new forms of educational research set out to test the factuality of such truisms. Highly interventionist studies (cf. Newmann and Associates 1996; Darling-Hammond 1996, 1997) were conducted in the USA that tested, against virtually every category of readiness and/or disadvantage, whether a particular approach to teaching and schooling could break through the disadvantage effect. The particular approach to teaching and schooling goes by various names but is most commonly captured in the notion of ‘quality teaching’, a notion that encompasses both the work of individual teachers in classrooms and, ideally, the work of whole-school teaching regimes.

The results of these studies have called into question earlier conceptions relating to the alleged limitations of teacher and school potential to impact on student development. In a myriad of contexts, results showed that, where the disadvantaged cohorts were facilitated by ‘quality teaching’ and their non-disadvantaged equivalent cohorts were being supported by ‘ineffective teaching’, it was the disadvantaged who were invariably shown to achieve at a greater rate. In summary, when faced with all the ‘proven’ barriers to learning of heritage and/or environment, be they barriers based on gender, class, language or even disabilities of sorts, effective teaching practices had sufficient power to improve the chances of the disadvantaged and, in some instances and over time, to change the assumptions underlying the advantage/disadvantage divide altogether. While many remain sceptical, the effect is that the earlier thesis about the centrality of heritage and environment to achievement is fairly quickly being replaced as a core belief by a new optimism about the positive effects of teaching quality (Rowe 2004).

Teaching Quality and the Values Link

The Carnegie Corporation’s Task Force on Learning (Carnegie Corporation 1996) was a clearly identifiable agency in spelling out the new belief and impelling the research that stands behind the modern era of quality teaching. It was, for the era, surprisingly explicit in its statement of beliefs about the power of teachers and schooling systems to effect change in student achievement. In a central tenet, the Task Force Report, titled Every Child can Learn, asserted:

One of the problems that has undermined school reform efforts…is the belief that differences in the educational performance of schools are primarily the result of differences in students’ inherent ability to learn (or not). This belief is wrong. Schools fail… (p. 3)

Carnegie’s central challenge was to the conventional wisdom that heritage and environment were the dominant predictors of success or failure at school. It did not
deny the many research findings that seemed to point to this inevitable conclusion nor to the reality that heritage and environment were obviously influential factors in determining a student’s success or failure. Nor did Carnegie set out to debunk the quality of such research or the conclusions arrived at validly within the ambit of the methodologies that drove it. The challenge was rather around the unreflective linearity that characterized such research and the unquestioning acceptance of its findings. Carnegie proffered that a different set of assumptions, based on a more far-reaching and comprehensive philosophy of the role of teaching and schooling, and the employment of less traditional research evidence, such as the findings emerging from the neurosciences (Bruer 1999), would have yielded very different results from those that earlier research had pronounced as inevitable and beyond contention.

Consistent with the tenor of the entire report, Carnegie placed the final responsibility for student achievement on the school, and especially on its teachers, to make the difference. The report redefined what was meant by achievement and identified a range of learning skills that should constitute the targets for teacher and school learning objectives. Here, also, the report challenged more limited conceptions of the role of the teacher and the school. While not underselling the centrality of intellectual development as the prime focus and objective of teaching and schooling, the report nonetheless expanded significantly on the more predictable features of intellectual development to speak explicitly of the broader learning associated with skills of communication, empathy, reflection and self-management. Intriguingly, the sections dealing with these associated skills seemed to imply a strong focus on the student self, including student self-knowing.

Hence, the notion of ‘intellectual depth’, so central to the regime of quality teaching, was defined not in an instrumentalist and narrow fashion but in the broadest possible way, to connote not only the depth of factual learning but, moreover, induction into the kind of profound learning that is attained through competencies such as interpretation, communication, negotiation and reflection, with a focus on self-management. In a word, the teacher’s job transcended conceptions of student achievement beyond qualities that can be measured by standardized testing or simple observation to being one which engaged the students’ more sophisticated skills concerned with the development of such features as ‘communicative capacity’, ‘empathic consciousness’ and ‘self-reflection’. These are learning outcomes that are not so easily reduced to instrumentalist forms of measurement and outcomes that are highly pertinent to the notion that values are an inextricable factor in good practice pedagogy. It is clear for instance that notions like ‘communicative capacity’ and ‘empathic consciousness’, or being switched on to one’s world and its challenges, have potential to inform the dispositions and actions necessary to global citizenry and a highly developed social conscience, while ‘self-reflection’, or being switched on to oneself, has similar potential as a vital tool in the development of an integrated personal development and morality. In summary, the idea of teaching quality to be found in Carnegie implied that it is not just the surface factual learning, so characteristic of education of old, that needs to be superseded, but it is surface learning, in general, that is to be surpassed in favour of an educational approach that
engages the whole person in depth of cognition, social and emotional maturity, and self-knowledge and development.

There are other criteria found commonly in the literature of quality teaching that strengthen the notion that effective teaching is inherently a values-filled enterprise (cf. Qld 1999). One of these is ‘relevance’. It is said that the quality teacher is one who can find the point of relevance for students concerning any topic. In other words, quality teaching entails the art of connecting, and being seen to connect, with the real worlds of students. The quality teacher is one who is able to enter these worlds with comfort and conviction and win the trust of the students in his or her care. Hence, the relationship between teacher and student and the establishment of a teaching regime marked by trust and care are inextricable components of teaching quality. Another quality teaching criterion is ‘supportiveness’. It is said that the quality teacher will construct a positive and conducive learning environment. It builds on the fundamental notion that people learn best when they feel comfortable, secure and affirmed, a notion confirmed by modern research to be fundamental to student success (Rowe 2004). Quality teaching research of the kind noted herein has alerted the educational community to the greater potential of teaching to impact on those wider dimensions of learning that pertain to holistic student development. At the heart of such research lies an inextricable values component. In other words, teaching of the kind being espoused is inherently values oriented and values filled.

Values: The Missing Link in Quality Teaching

If one could level a criticism at quality teaching as it has been implemented systematically in places, it is that it has potential to become in time as much a victim of instrumentalist thought and technical means as many of the regimes it has superseded. In other words, there is as much potential to reduce notions of intellectual depth, relevance and supportiveness to formulas that become fixed, politicized and supposedly easily observed and measured, as was the case in earlier times with notions of objectives, outcomes, competencies and indeed intellectual quotient (IQ). When this happens, the formulas and measurements of behaviour which underpin the laudable criteria of quality teaching become insular, uncritical and determined by the terms of their own making, in the way that is now generally said to have been true of IQ testing regimes of the past. The challenge for contemporary quality teaching regimes therefore is to avoid, or at least temper, the inclination towards reductionism to those formulaic devices that appeal to systems in their desire to control and standardize the products of research. A focus on the values component of quality teaching is one way in which this might be achieved, for this focus serves as a constant reminder that there is in fact no magical teaching formula and that student achievement is a complex phenomenon that defies simplistic forms of measurement, being determined rather by a wide range of factors, some measured with apparent ease but some which could never be measured by even the most sophisticated instruments.
By way of example, in an Australian Council of Educational Research study, Rowe (2004) noted that, of all the teacher qualities nominated by those students who achieve best at school, it was notions of care and trust that were paramount. While the more predictable measures of demonstrable content knowledge and stimulating technique were evident, as one would expect, they rarely stood alone and appeared to be subordinate to the greater indicator of student confidence that the teacher was trustworthy and had the students’ best interests at heart. Similarly, Louden et al. (2004) concluded that it was difficult to predict likely student effects from simple observation of teacher practice. One might caricature the findings of this study as suggesting that, lying behind the relationship between practitioner and student was the far more powerful relationship between elder and younger person. In some extreme instances, the study found that superior student outcomes could actually emanate from inadequate or less than effective teacher practice as long as a positive relationship existed between teacher and student. Similarly, Hattie’s (2004) appraisal of a myriad of studies around teacher expertise (normally taken to connote a set of instrumental measures) placed ‘respect for students’ at the top of the list of those characteristics that are always present when such claims are made. Meanwhile, Brady’s (2005) work has shown ‘relationship between teacher and student’ to be at least as significant as technical proficiency in enhancing student performance. These more recent findings fit well with earlier literature concerned with effective organizational change and reform where, similarly, notions of trust and care emerged as those that define much of the difference between organizations that function well and those that do not (Bryk and Schneider 1996, 2002). Anthony Bryk, himself allied with much of the work of Newmann around quality teaching, noted the following:

Trust relations culminate in important consequences at the organizational level, including more effective decision-making, enhanced social support for innovation, more efficient social control of adults’ work and an expanded moral authority to ‘go the extra mile’ for the children. Relational trust…is an organizational property…it’s presence (or absence) has important consequences for the functioning of the school and its capacity to engage fundamental change. (Bryk and Schneider 2002, p. 22)

Furthermore, Bryk and Schneider (2002, p. 23) spell out the connotations of what they describe as ‘relational trust’ in the “…dynamic interplay among four considerations: respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity.” In turn, these considerations comprise the cornerstone of the ‘Values School’ (cf. Farrer 2000; Hawkes 2009) experimental work in the UK, reported by OfSted (2007) to have had positive impact on all educational measures, including academic achievement. It is proffered therefore that values being explicated as a component part of quality teaching has the potential to take such teaching to the seat of its own power by focussing teacher and system attention on those features of their professional practice that the research evidence identifies will have most impact. These features comprise the relationship of due care, mutual respect, fairness and positive modelling established with the student and, in turn, the network of systemic ‘relational trust’ that results.
One is reminded, many years on, of the caution against instrumentalist approaches to education that was provided by the eminent John Dewey in the early days of public education. He said that to depend overly on a scientific approach to education, being centrally about subject knowledge and methods would be fatal to the best interests of education. He spoke, rather, of the need to see education as a mode of life, cultivating a mindset on the part of teachers that was, at one and the same time, self-reflective and directed towards instilling reflectivity, inquiry and a capacity for moral judiciousness on the part of students (cf. Dewey 1916, 1929). Dewey would not be at all surprised with the findings of updated research noted above. We will return to Dewey and associated seminal philosophers of knowledge and education in the following chapter.

The Nexus of Values and Pedagogy

Since the early 1990s, there has been a concentration of effort aimed at maximizing student achievement in school education and rectifying the debilitating effects of failure. The Carnegie Corporation Taskforce on Student Achievement (Carnegie Corporation 1996), referred to above, drew on new research in a variety of fields to refute the narrow assumptions and findings of conventional educational research and to assert that effective learning requires a response that is as much about affect and social dynamics as about cognition. In so doing, it re-defined learning to incorporate into the notion of ‘intellectual depth’ matters of communicative competence, empathic character and self-reflection as being at least as significant to learning as the indisputably important technical skills of recall, description, analysis and synthesis. Carnegie represented a watershed moment that marked at least one of the beginnings of re-assessing the assumptions of good practice pedagogy.

For all its importance, Carnegie is merely representative of a number of impelling events around pedagogy. The work of Darling-Hammond (1996, 1997), an active member of the Taskforce, is especially representative of such events. Darling-Hammond’s vast store of empirical data has continued to illustrate the potentially powerful effects of reassessed assumptions, and their allied and reinvigorated pedagogy, on student achievement. Her work stands as potent justification of the challenges rendered by the Taskforce to the traditional assumptions and approaches that characterized most of Western education throughout the twentieth century.

Carnegie also pre-figured the nexus between values and pedagogy by illustrating that effective learning is inherently values-filled. The fundamental difference between this new values agenda in learning and more traditional forms of moral (or ‘values’) education is that the latter was largely regarded as a moral imperative, and hence negotiable and subject to ideological debate, whereas the new values agenda increasingly connotes a pedagogical imperative that incorporates the moral, but also the social, emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual aspects of human development. Herein, a values approach to learning is seen to be an indispensable artefact to any learning environment if student achievement, entailing and incorpor-
rating holistic development and wellbeing, is to be optimized. As such, it is neither negotiable nor dependent on personal or corporate ideology. The innovative and possibly revolutionary thought contained in this proposition is that, in a sense, student achievement is best understood and approached as a veritable by-product of a ‘whole-person’ approach to learning. This notion brings into question previous views of learning as a compartmentalised and linear process, and calls for a reassessment of the traditional assumptions and allied approaches that Carnegie implied had led too often to student failure.

Fred Newmann (Newmann and Associates 1996) is rightly regarded as an architect of modern quality teaching but could also be seen as one who, wittingly or unwittingly, contributed to the notion of there being a nexus between values and the kind of quality teaching that his work has come to represent. Newmann’s work centred on identifying the ‘pedagogical dynamics’ required for quality teaching. These dynamics range from the instrumental (e.g. sound technique, updated professional development) to the more aesthetic and values-filled. For instance, ‘catering for diversity’ is quite beyond more conventional notions of addressing individual differences. When unpacked, Newmann is speaking of the centrality to effective teaching of a respectful, insightful relationship between the teacher and the student, one that ensures that the student feels accepted, understood, encouraged and valued. Similarly, Newmann’s concept of ‘school coherence’ as a school that is committed holistically and unwaveringly to the good of the student is a values-rich concept that connotes dedication, responsibility, generosity and integrity on the part of teachers, principals and stakeholders. It is a dimension of quality teaching that is effectively about the mission of the school to place student wellbeing as its highest imperative.

Above all, Newmann’s notion of ‘trustful, supportive ambience’ is about the ethics and aesthetics of the relationships that surround the student, most centrally the relationship with the teacher(s). Although school ambience is not easily measured, Newmann suggests, it is so indispensable to the more instrumentalist and easily measured aspects of quality teaching that it will render these latter mute and futile ventures if it is not attended to. School coherence, a trustful, supportive environment and respectful student–teacher relationships are dimensions of quality teaching that are too often neglected by stakeholders who insist that the answer to student success lies in more linear instruction, more persistent testing and teachers who are content-driven rather than people-driven.

Newmann’s work coincided with the work of Carnegie that, as illustrated, had drawn on research in the emerging ‘new neurosciences’ to show that effective learning requires a response that is as much about affect and social dynamics as about cognition. The evidence emanating from the new neurosciences on which Carnegie drew has been sharpened in the work of Damasio (2003) and Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007), and this work will be fully unveiled, and its potential impact on values pedagogy conveyed, in Chap. 3. These research findings illustrate why it is that attending to matters of affect and sociality, such as trust, care and encouraging relationships in schools can have such a positive impact on learning in general (Bryk and Schneider 1996, 2002; Rowe 2004).
Furthermore, there is now a vast store of evidence from values education research itself that the establishment of a positive, caring and encouraging ambience of learning, together with explicit discourse about values in ways that draw on students’ deeper learning and reflectivity, has power to transform the patterns of feelings, behaviour, resilience and academic diligence that might once have been the norm among students (cf. Arthur 2003, 2010; Benninga et al. 2006; Carr 2006, 2007; Lovat and Toomey 2009; Lovat et al. 2009b; Lovat et al. 2010; Noddings 2002; Nucci and Narvaez 2008). Much of this evidence has been captured in the research and practice of the projects emanating from the National Framework in Values Education for Australian Schools (DEST 2005). Central among these projects was the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project (VEGPSP) (DEST 2006; DEEWR 2008) and the Project to Test and Measure the Impact of Values Education on Student Effects and School Ambience (Lovat et al. 2009b). These projects and the relevance of their findings for values pedagogy will be outlined briefly below and will be referred to in greater depth in subsequent chapters. It is the findings emanating from these projects, with which the authors have been intimately engaged, that form the substance of the empirical evidence that sits behind many of the claims made in this book about the central importance of values pedagogy if all the effects connoted by student achievement are to be optimized.

Values in Australian Schooling

Since the early 1990s, each state and territory education system in Australia has been actively promoting its system and teachers as inculcators of the essential values that define being Australian and being a global citizen. The Australian Government captured this movement well, and put its own seal on it, in its ‘Civics Expert Group’ report in 1994 (cf. DEETYA 1994). However termed, it is now commonly accepted that an essential component of public education’s responsibilities is to be found in the work of inculcating values in its students. In short, public education is now defined as a comprehensive educator, not just chartered around cognitive and practical skills but as an inculcator of personal morality and cohesive citizenry. Furthermore, curricula related to civics, citizenship and values education have been designed and trialled in a variety of forms, both free-standing and integrated into mainstream syllabuses.

The above state of affairs has not been without its critics both from within and beyond the realm of public education. Criticism has come in different forms. One criticism comes from the belief that public schooling was designed essentially as a haven of values-neutrality. In contrast and in fact, the documents of the 1870s and 1880s that contained the charters of the various state and territory systems reveal a breadth of vision about the scope of education. Beyond the standard goals of literacy and numeracy, education was said to be capable of assuring personal morality for each individual and a suitable citizenry for the soon-to-be new nation. As an instance, the New South Wales Public Instruction Act of 1880 (cf. NSW 1912)
stressed the need for students to be inculcated into the values of their society, including understanding the role that cultural and religious values had played in forming that society’s legal codes and social ethics. The notion, therefore, that Australian public education is part of a deep and ancient heritage around values-neutrality is mistaken and in need of serious revision. The evidence suggests that public education’s initial conception was of being the complete educator, not only of young people’s minds but of their inner character as well.

If the move to values-neutrality in public education was an aberration, then the efforts of the 1990s and the early 2000s could be regarded as a corrective. Responding both to community pressure and the realization that values-neutrality is an inappropriate ethic for any agency of formation, every Australian State and Territory has re-stated the original view that public education’s charter includes responsibility for personal integrity and social justice. This movement has been evident not only in government reports but in academic and professional literature. As an instance, the 2002 Yearbook of the professional body of teachers, the Australian College of Educators, was devoted to values education (cf. Pascoe and Australian College of Educators 2002). Furthermore, the Australian Government report, Values Education Study (DEST 2003), represented another important step in overcoming old and entrenched attitudes around the issue.

Values Education Study

In 2003, the Australian Government initiated a small-scale study, titled Values Education Study (DEST 2003). The Report’s Executive Summary re-stated the positions of the nineteenth century charters of public education in asserting that values education “…refers to any explicit and/or implicit school-based activity to promote student understanding and knowledge of values… (and) …to inculcate the skills and dispositions of students so they can enact particular values as individuals and as members of the wider community.” (DEST 2003, p. 2). The study consisted of 50 funded projects designed in part to serve as the case study data for the report. While these projects differed markedly from each other and functioned across all systems of education, most of them had in common a focus on practical behaviour change as an outcome. The report stated that, for the most part, “…the 50 final projects (which involved 69 schools) were underpinned by a clear focus on building more positive relationships within the school as a central consideration for implementing values education on a broader scale.” (DEST 2003, p. 3).

The Government report was initially endorsed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), a group representing all State and Territory Education ministers in association with the Federal Minister. At the meeting that endorsed its terms of reference, MCEETYA noted the following:
that education is as much about building character as it is about equipping students with specific skills; 
that values-based education can strengthen students’ self-esteem, optimism and commitment to personal fulfilment; and help students exercise ethical judgment and social responsibility; and, 
that parents expect schools to help students understand and develop personal and social responsibilities. (DEST 2003, p. 10)

With the 2003 report, the aberration of values-neutrality in public education was finally put to rest in complete fashion at the highest and most representative levels of Australian education. Appropriately, the report did not differentiate between public, private and religious systems of schooling, nor did the case study analyses find any substantial difference in the directionality or outcomes of the projects that operated across these systems. On the basis of this evidence at least, public and private education systems were as one in their charter around values education and in their capacity to implement it.

The preamble to the draft principles which were developed as a result of the study stated explicitly that “…schools are not value-free or value-neutral zones of social and educational engagement.” (DEST 2003, p. 12). Among the draft principles was one that spoke of values education as part of the explicit charter of schooling, rather than in any way incidental to its goals. It also made it clear that it is not designed merely as an intellectual exercise but is aimed at changing behaviour by promoting care, respect and cooperation. Another principle spoke of the need for values education to be managed through a “…developmentally appropriate curriculum that meets the individual needs of students” (DEST 2003, p. 12), while yet another addressed the need for “…clearly defined and achievable outcomes… (being) evidence-based and… (using) evaluation to monitor outcomes.” (DEST 2003, p. 13). The first principle identified above clearly re-established the charter for values education as part and parcel of all education.

With the guidance of these principles, the fullness of the potential positive effects of values education became evident for the first time. The language of the report extended traditional conceptions of values education as being marginal, to conceptions of it as mainstream and impacting on all developmental measures. Teacher testimony spoke of values education as impacting on a comprehensive array of factors, insights and behaviours, including: student welfare; social justice; community service; human rights; intercultural awareness; environmental sustainability; mutual respect; cohesion and peace; social, emotional and behavioural wellbeing; building communities; student self-discipline; student resilience; pedagogical strength; improved outcomes; student engagement; ‘doing well’ at school; student self-management; and, building a learning community (Lovat 2009). The modern agenda of values education as a means of instilling comprehensive forms of student wellbeing was opened up by the tenor of the report, a tenor that was then built on in the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools (DEST 2005).
The National Framework

In the 2004 Federal Budget, $A 29.7 million dollars was allocated to build and develop a national values education program, guided by the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools (DEST 2005). The National Framework has driven a number of important projects related to best practice in schools, teacher education, involvement of parents and other stakeholders and resources. The largest project, the VEGPSP, impacted on 316 Australian schools in 51 clusters. The schools were drawn from all sectors across all States and Territories, with many of the clusters consisting of schools from across the sectors of public, private and religious. Throughout its two stages, VEGPSP involved over 100,000 school students and over 10,000 teachers. At its core were the 51 Cluster Leaders (senior teachers) and their University Associates (academic mentors). Between these two functions, the research and practice nexus of the project was assured.

While cluster projects varied, they were all guided by the conceptual basis of the National Framework, as well as its guiding principles and core values. The guiding principles were explicitly connected with the charter for schooling explicated by Federal, State and Territory Ministers in the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty First Century (MCEETYA 1999), the so called ‘Adelaide Declaration’. The Adelaide Declaration represented a marked shift in educational philosophy as it had progressed in the later part of the twentieth century. The instrumentalist and reductionist nature of educational research in the second half of the twentieth century had tended to narrow the goals of schooling around job and career preparation, with similarly narrow perspectives on the kinds of competencies and outcomes required of effective learning. In contrast, the Adelaide Declaration revived the far richer vision of the nineteenth century educational foundation charters referred to above, including an emphasis on the comprehensive role for schools in matters of citizenship and the specific role of values formation as a core function of effective schooling. The Declaration also showed sensitivity to contemporary concerns around human development in specifying that “…schooling provides a foundation for young Australians’ intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development.” (MCEETYA 1999).

Illustrating that the Adelaide Declaration was far from a ‘one off’, idiosyncratic moment in Australian education, the later ‘Melbourne Declaration’, Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA 2008), reiterated this vision of a broader and more holistic charter for twenty-first century schooling. The Preamble to the Document states:

Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians. (p. 4)

In a word, the Adelaide and Melbourne Declarations make it plain that effective schooling connotes an environment that encourages, supports and nurtures the holistic development of its students. The challenge is always one of finding the practical structures and pedagogies that facilitate such an ambience. This is where the
National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools (DEST 2005) has been so important.

The Framework built on these broad perspectives in proffering values education as a means of facilitating the lofty and comprehensive goals for schooling envisaged by the declarations above. It spoke of values-based education as a way of addressing some of the social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic developmental issues that schooling tends to neglect. Specifically, it stated that such education has potential to strengthen students’ optimism, self-esteem, sense of personal fulfilment, ethical judgment and social responsibility. Furthermore, it asserted that values education is essential to effective schooling, integral to all key learning areas, crucial to wellbeing and reflective of good practice pedagogy. The Framework rationale made explicit reference to the language of quality teaching as both supporting and being enhanced by values education. Herein, was the vital link with quality teaching, the ‘double helix effect’ (Lovat and Toomey 2009), that sees the resultant learning implied in quality teaching (intellectual depth, communicative competence, empathic character, self-reflection) more readily and easily achieved in the learning ambience created by values education.

Values Education Good Practice Schools Project

The Australian Government’s VEGPSP has provided the opportunity for the theses and related evidence outlined above to be tested in multiple settings and using an array of values education criteria. The VEGPSP Stage 1 and 2 Final Reports (DEST 2006; DEEWR 2008) offered ample evidence that a well-constructed values education has potential for a profound effect on the whole educational system, affecting such variables as school ethos, teacher practice, classroom climate, student attitudes and behaviours, parental and community connections, as well as student attention to academic work.

Much of the language of the testimony provided by teachers and university associates in the reports captures well the intersection between matters relating to enhanced academic attainment and the depth of thinking, affirmative classroom climate and positive relationships implied in the nexus between quality teaching and values education. The Stage 1 Report (DEST 2006) speaks richly of an array of learning features that were enhanced by the various values education projects. These features included: quality teaching and pedagogy; holism in the approach to student development; quality relationships at all levels; values being both modelled and enunciated in the curriculum; enhanced intellectual depth in both teacher and student understanding; greater levels of student engagement in the mainstream curriculum; student willingness to become more involved in complex thinking across the curriculum; increased pedagogical approaches that match those espoused by quality teaching; greater student responsibility over local, national and international issues; greater student resilience and social skills; improved relationships of care and trust; measurable decline in the incidence of inappropriate behaviour; greater
student awareness of the need to be tolerant of others, to accept responsibility for their own actions and their ability to communicate; improved students’ sense of belonging, connectedness, resilience and sense of self; reflective change in the participant teachers and schools; provision of the opportunity to explore from within and reflect on identity and purpose; changed approaches to curriculum and pedagogy; enhanced students’ ability to articulate feelings and emotions impelling their emotional development; evident transference in all aspects of classroom teaching and in the students’ ability to deal with conflict in the playground; calmer and more cohesive classroom atmosphere; creation of a comfort zone for discussing emotions; improved levels of happiness for staff and students; development of higher order thinking skills; introduction of restorative pedagogical practices; changes in the ways teachers related with students; improved engagement and commitment of pupils, teachers and parents; a greater appreciation of the need to create interpersonal intimacy and trust in the classroom; and, the ‘ripple’ or ‘trickle-down’ effect that values education had across the school.

Beyond these general sentiments, substantial testimony included the following: …the documented behaviour of students has improved significantly, evidenced in vastly reduced incidents and discipline reports and suspensions. The school is….a ‘much better place to be’. Children are ‘well behaved’, demonstrate improved self-control, relate better to each other and, most significantly, share with teachers a common language of expectations…. Other evidence of this change in the social environment of the school is the significant rise in parental satisfaction. (p. 41)
The way that most teachers model behaviour to the students has changed. The way many teachers speak to students has changed. It is now commonplace for teachers to speak to students in values terms,…for example, if a child has hurt another child, we would bring to the child’s attention the values of ‘Respect’, ‘Care’ and ‘Compassion’ as well as ‘Responsible’ for our actions…. As a staff we realise the importance of modelling good behaviour and the values are the basis for this. (p. 75)
Everyone in the classroom exchange, teachers and students alike, became more conscious of trying to be respectful, trying to do their best, and trying to give others a fair go. We also found that by creating an environment where these values were constantly shaping classroom activity, student learning was improving, teachers and students were happier, and school was calmer. (p. 120)
…has provided many benefits to the students as far as a coordinated curriculum and learning experiences that have offered a sense of belonging, connectedness, resilience and a sense of self. However, there has been none more significant than the reflective change that has occurred in the participant teachers and schools. (p. 185)

Similarly, the Stage 2 Report (DEEWR 2008) uncovered the vital link between a values approach to pedagogy and the ambience it created with the holistic effects of this approach on student behaviour and performance. In Stage 2, a number of features of the broad values approach were clarified. These included the explicitness of the pedagogy around values being seen to be determinative, a greater awareness about the crucial significance of the teacher, and the role of an experiential or ‘service learning’ component coming to be seen as a particularly powerful agency in values pedagogy. The following quotes are indicative of these features:

The principle of explicitness applies more broadly and pervasively than has been previously recognised…values-based schools live and breathe a values consciousness. They
become schools where values are thought about, talked about, taught about, reflected upon and enacted across the whole school in all school activities. (p. 37)

We observed that those teachers whose classrooms were characterised by an inclusive culture of caring and respect and where character development played an important and quite often explicit role in the daily learning of students were those same teachers who also demonstrated a high level of personal development, self-awareness of, and commitment to their own values and beliefs. (p. 39)

Uniformly, teachers report that doing something with and for the community increases the students’ engagement in their learning. This resonates with an interesting but relatively new proposition in education: when students have opportunities to give to their community, to something beyond themselves, it changes their attitude to the learning tasks. (p. 41)

It was...observed (within the school) that where teachers were seeing the importance of establishing relationships and of respecting their students—this was reflected in the behaviour of their students…. Where teachers are embracing values education as something that is important and to be embedded in practice—their pedagogy is enhanced. (pp. 81–82)

The evidence from VEGPSP suggests that values education has the power to produce changes in classroom ambience and to effect positive influence on school culture more generally. Values education offered a licence for engagement in dialogue around values and ultimately for a common language to develop between staff and students by which improved relationships, behaviour and the addressing of difficult issues could be brokered. The ‘ripple’ effect of values education, cited above, was observed across sectors, and served as a catalyst for a positive change in the demeanour of the whole school, especially cohering around factors concerned with teacher–student relationships, teacher and student wellbeing and student attention to academic responsibilities. Consistent with Newmann’s thesis that the key to effective teaching was in the ambience of learning, it seemed apparent that it was in the creation of an environment where the explicated values were shaping behaviour that student learning began to improve. A quote that captured much of the comprehensiveness of the findings, and also pointed to the next logical stage of investigation, is in the following:

...focussed classroom activity, calmer classrooms with students going about their work purposefully, and more respectful behaviour between students. Teachers and students also reported improved relationships between the two groups. Other reports included improved student attendance, fewer reportable behaviour incidents and the observation that students appeared happier. (DEEWR 2008, p. 27)

Thus, the VEGPSP Stage 1 and 2 Reports illustrate the dynamics of the reciprocal interaction between values education and quality teaching. Courtesy of their evidence, we have ample demonstration that a well-constructed, clear and intentional values education program being integrated into the fabric of the school has the potential to bring transformational changes in the ethos of the school and the learning environment of the classroom, extending to student and teacher behaviour beneficial effects on student motivation to learn and more than a hint of improved academic achievement.

As illustrated in the quote above, by the time the Stage 2 Report was compiled, there was a growing indication that the vast array of anecdotal data and teacher testimony were testable in some way. This led directly to the Project to Test and
Measure the Impact of Values Education on Student Effects and School Ambience (Lovat et al. 2009b).

‘Testing and Measuring’ the Impact of Values on Pedagogy

As asserted above, the thesis about the inextricable link between quality teaching and an integrated values orientation, as well as the particularly beneficial effects of a service learning component as part of this mix, was the subject of much anecdotal evidence and strong teacher assertion in the two stages of VEGPSP (DEST 2006; DEEWR 2008). Across the three years in which the project rolled out, the nature of the evidence shifted from being purely qualitative to having a quantitative edge, albeit lacking formal instrumentation and measurement. These latter were brought to bear in the Project to Test and Measure the Impact of Values Education on Student Effects and School Ambience (Lovat et al. 2009b). In this study, there was interest in all of the claims being made around student effects, with a dedicated focus on arguably the most contentious set of claims, namely those around student academic improvement. Granted the high stakes around this claim, the study was characterized by intensive quantitative as well as qualitative methods of analysis. In the end, the authors believed there was sufficient tested evidence to support the claim that a well crafted values education program, functioning as best practice pedagogy and therefore following the criteria of quality teaching and eliciting the goals implied by service learning, had potential to impact on a range of measures typically correlated with student achievement. These measures included, in turn, school ambience, student–teacher relationships, student and teacher wellbeing, and student academic diligence.

Concerning the matter of school ambience, evidence was elicited from students, teachers and parents that spoke of a “…’calmer’ environment with less conflict and with a reduction in the number of referrals to the planning room” (Lovat et al. 2009b, p. 8). Of student–teacher relationships, there was evidence of a “…rise in levels of politeness and courtesy, open friendliness, better manners, offers of help, and students being more kind and considerate…the main impact of values education on student–teacher relationships appeared to be a greater understanding of each other’s perspective or at least to have a greater respect for each other’s position” (p. 9). About student wellbeing, the report provided evidence of “…the creation of a safer and more caring school community, a greater self-awareness, a greater capacity for self-appraisal, self-regulation and enhanced self-esteem” (p. 10). Arguably, the most contentious evidence was that concerned with the factor of student academic diligence. Here, the report spoke at length about students “…putting greater effort into their work and ‘striving for quality’, ‘striving to achieve their best’ and even ‘striving for perfection’”; “The aspect of students taking greater pride in their work and producing quality outcomes for their own pleasure was also mentioned by both teachers and parents” (p. 6). The report continues: