Chapter 12
A Vision Splendid?

The National Initiative in Values Education for Australian Schooling

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1 Introduction

In July 2005 the then Australian Government Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon'ble Dr. Brendan Nelson MP, visited an independent school in Hamilton, a regional town in the State of Victoria. He was there to open a new science facility. It was an ordinary task of office undertaken by most ministers of education in most countries. However, on this occasion, in his address to the school community, the Australian Minister outlined a vision for education in Australia that highlighted a significant new focus he and the government were pursuing in their national education policy. The focus was on the role of schooling in values education.

"Our (government's) vision of education", declared the Minister, "is that every human being in this country and every young person in particular should be able to achieve their potential." In that task all schools had a critical role to play in "not only teaching young people how to learn, but also creating well-rounded, well-adjusted, caring, constructive, responsible, and hopefully, compassionate adults". Of all the things necessary to develop such "ethical and responsible citizens, the first", he said, "is the building of character". In the building of character, the bricks and mortar are values, "and the concern I have", said the Minister,

> is that if we provide a values-free education to young Australians, we risk producing values-free adults. . . . We all love life talent but in the end it's character that really counts. And that's why values education is so important and that is why parents increasingly make sacrifices to send their children to schools like this one, one which so strongly represents values which we want to see instilled in our children. (Nelson 2005)

The Minister's speech reflected a serious concern about the role contemporary schooling was playing – or not playing – in the moral development of young Australians. It implied, too, that school education had become so "values free" that parents were choosing to send their children to private schools in pursuit of education with a strong values culture. In Australia such a claim is politically and educationally very contentious but it is these concerns that have made values education a major national education priority and led to a new vision for the place of values education in Australian schooling.

D.N. Aspin and J.D. Chapman (eds.), *Values Education and Lifelong Learning.*

The Australian Government's national initiative began in mid-2002 when the Minister commissioned a Values Education Study. From that study, and the consultation that followed, the Government developed a *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools*. This National Framework, which was endorsed by all the State and Territory ministers of education and sent to all Australian schools in 2005, has since become the blueprint for a multifaceted values education programme. The document, in its Context Statement says that "education is as much about building character as it is about equipping students with specific skills" (DEST 2005, p. 1) and offers schools a vision and a set of core "Values for Australian Schooling" as well as guidelines for strengthening values education in schools. As the Minister explained to his audience in Hamilton, "We spent two years conducting research and consultation to develop nine core values that should and will underwrite education in this country and we will be funding every single school to discuss those values with their parents, the broader community and their teachers" (Nelson 2005).

The release of the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* was both the end point of one phase and the starting point for the next phase of the national initiative. To engage every school in the country an implementation phase was going to require a major strategy and significant national funding. The Australian Government committed itself to this task on 8 May 2004 when it was announced in the 2004–2005 budget that $29.7 million would be allocated to realising the vision for values education during the 2004–2008 quadrennium.

Although the Australian Government initiative in values education has arisen from a more general resurgence of interest in values education, the initiative has resulted in a series of national debates.

First there is the debate about the quality of education in public schools, the drift of enrolments to private schools and the associated issue of government funding for the private school sector. The secular government education sector has come under criticism for producing a "values-neutral" or "values-free" education, leaving students with an incomplete preparation for work, life, and moral fulfilment. This criticism has been hotly contested. Meanwhile, in Catholic education and in other faith-based schools of the independent schooling sector the notion of "values education" is seen as having a long-established tradition where values are a well-integrated core of what is offered and practised in schools. The contrast, so the contentious argument goes, helps to explain why more and more Australian parents are opting out of the government school sector and enrolling their children in the "values-rich" non-government schools.

In another theatre of argument, the values education initiative has become embroiled in wider "cultural wars" within Australia. These "cultural wars" have been fought out in history texts, the media, the nation's cultural institutions and in education. In this context the Federal Government's values programme has been seen by some as part of an overt attempt to assert conservative, traditional, and nationalistic values in schools as a means of bolstering a particular notion of national unity. In the face of Australia's growing multicultural population, debates over

refugees, the insecurities of global terrorism and Australia's military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, the assertion of "Australian" values in schools is seen by some as an instrument for defining and restricting membership of Australian society. By contrast, it is seen by others as a means for promoting harmony and social cohesion.

The national values education initiative has also aroused intense discussion over the growing assertion of Federal Government power in education. Education in Australia is constitutionally the responsibility of State and Territory governments and the Federal Government has no constitutional power to regulate education policy or local curriculum. Critics suggest that the values education initiative is another example of where the national government is using its funding muscle to directly influence schools and to impose a national agenda in a curriculum domain. The other side argues that the national government is simply asserting a much needed leadership in a critical area of education that is of national importance and is trying to counteract the inefficiencies and inconsistencies arising from eight different State and Territory education jurisdictions.

In addition to the political debates, the national values education initiative has faced ongoing philosophical and educational debates about the nature of the values being promoted, the validity of the approaches to values education being modelled and the perennial issues of the place of values in school education, the role of teachers and how values education outcomes can be sensibly monitored and evaluated.

Values education in Australia has been going through a radical transformation in the context of such ongoing debates. The Australian Government's values education initiative is both a product and a champion of this transformation, a transformation that has two faces. If the purposes of education are both individual in serving the needs of the learner and societal in serving the needs of the community, values education in Australia has become the means for promoting, first, a renewed sense of the school's role in providing education for the holistic well-being and lifelong learning in the individual lives of our students, and second, in promoting a determined quest to strengthen national social cohesion through an ethical and responsible citizenship built upon defined cultural norms. All this has occurred in an environment of perilous times, of global uncertainties and of significant national social transformations. In both guises – as the cornerstone of individual, holistic, lifelong learning and as a forge for fostering the nation's sense of itself and of its future, values education has become a major player through a determined and energetic national initiative driven by the conservative Federal Australian coalition government led by Prime Minister John Howard.

This chapter is a commentary on, and an analysis of, this intriguing initiative. Although the initiative is incomplete, the development of this attempt to realise a vision where values education will become a core part of schooling in all Australian schools is a compelling and instructive narrative. The pages that follow will offer an account of the initiative and the particular political, social, and education contexts that have compelled and constrained its development. They will reflect on some of the significant educational and philosophical challenges that have confronted the implementation along the way. And, finally, they will tender some

assessment of what has been achieved so far in this attempt at a major reformation in values education.

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2 The Context for Values Education in Australian Schooling

2.1 The Governance of Schooling

For a country with a small population of 20.4 million, Australia has an unusually complicated and multilayered system of school education. The system reflects a compromise of competing groups and purposes which is part product of history and part product of deliberate political decision-making. Within this composite arrangement the place of systemic values education has always been a central issue.

Historically, the Australian colonial governments of the 19th century originally opted for "a free, compulsory and secular" education system reflecting the separation of Church and State that characterised their fledgling political constitutions. The "free, compulsory and secular" approach, initiated by the colony of Victoria in its 1872 Education Act and followed later by other colonies, was designed to ensure that education would not be racked with the same acrimonious sectarian feuds of the Catholics and Protestants that had so dominated Britain and Europe. It was also egalitarian and aspirational in that it sought to ensure all citizens could have access to education no matter what their wealth or station in life. Although the system allowed for religious instruction in common Christianity the attempt to establish a purely secular system of schooling was short-lived. Unhappy with complete secularism and with the teaching of common Christianity the Catholic Church set out to build a separate school system. Protestant denominations also followed suit and developed "independent schools" to service their own communities. By the time Australia became a federated nation the foundations had been laid for a three-tier system of education: a public or government-funded school system, a Catholic education system funded and run by various religious orders and local parish priests, and an independent denominational schools sector funded by fee-paying parents and associated communities.

In 1901 Australia opted, uniquely by referendum, for a national constitution which created a federation. Under that Constitution the powers and responsibilities of government were divided between a national or Commonwealth government and the group of six founding States. The Commonwealth powers (such as immigration, customs and defence) were defined by the Constitution and all other powers – residual powers – resided with the States. Under this arrangement education became the separate responsibility of each of the State governments.

The addition of two Territories since federation means Australia now has eight different public government education systems each with their own parallel Catholic education systems and their own groups of loosely affiliated independent schools. Interestingly each State and Territory government education department is responsible not only for the funding and operation of its own government schools but also for general monitoring of the non-government education sectors and managing school registrations as well as curriculum and standards issues, although the extent to which the non-government sector must abide by the State or Territories curriculum varies among States and Territories.

2.2 The Funding of School Education

For many decades in the life of the new Commonwealth the funding of the dual public and private education sectors were kept separate. The proposal that taxpayers' funds should be used to support Catholic and independent schools arose after World War II and caused many years of bitter sectarian debate. The debate often burned around issues of equity, fair play, and parental choice. In 1963 public opinion had turned and the Commonwealth introduced limited grants to support some Catholic and some independent schools. At the same time the national Commonwealth Government began assuming a more proactive role in education through the power of its growing funding capacity. With rising costs and shifts in taxing powers the States and Territories became increasingly reliant on Commonwealth grant funding to manage their responsibilities in education.

Now, over 40 years later, the State government education sector and non-government schools both receive significant funding from the Australian Government. As the Prime Minister made clear at the June 2004 announcement of the Australian government's agenda for schools, school funding is now firmly established as a joint responsibility of the Australian Government and the States and Territories: "Each level of government contributes funds to schools" he explained, "The states and territories have the primary responsibility for funding state government schools, which they own and manage, while the Australian Government is the primary source for public funds of Catholic and independent schools" (DEST 2004, p. 1).

What is not immediately evident in this background is the shifting make-up of the public–private mix. In the last ten years the non-government school sector has experienced notable growth while the government school sector has seen only marginal enrolment expansion. Data from the National Schools Census reveal that in 2005 the proportion of full-time students attending non-government schools had risen to 32.9% compared to 29% a decade earlier. This shift is the result of a 22.2% increase in enrolments at non-government schools compared with only a 1.7% increase in enrolments at government schools in the same ten-year period from 1995 (ABS 2006b).

The causes of this phenomenon are debated frequently with public school proponents blaming a deterioration of public school funding and blossoming national government support for private schools as evidence of a bias towards privatised schooling. The Australian Government in turn argues that the trend simply shows parents exercising their right to choose whatever schooling they prefer for their children and that they prefer what they get at non-government schools. Both the situation and motivations at play are complex and include the increasing diversity in independent schooling with new Christian and Muslim schools now a feature of the mix. Values education has become directly caught up in this debate with the Prime Minister suggesting that parents want schools to support their values teaching and are simply rejecting the "values-free and politically correct" environment of government secular schooling. Parents' perceptions and expectations of quality schooling are not so simply generalised but debate over public vs. private schooling and the role of the national government in the issue has played a significant part in fostering the resurgence in values education and in shaping responses to the government's national values education initiative.

It is worth taking a closer look at some of the broader political, economic, and social trends that have also contributed to this resurgence.

2.3 The Political Backdrop

The political climate in Australia has been very stable and, for the last ten years, has been dominated by the conservative coalition national government of Prime Minister Howard. The last Federal election in 2004 saw the Howard Government cement its control of the national agenda when it won a majority in both houses of the national parliament. Paradoxically, although not unusually for Australia, during this period the same voters in the eight States and Territories have opted for centre-left governments of the Australian Labor Party at the State and Territory level. As education becomes increasingly subject to a dual responsibility shared between national and State or Territory governments, such a contrasting political environment is not conducive to easy and efficient education policy development. To attempt a major national education reform initiative such as values education in these circumstances could, on the face of it, appear to be either excessively optimistic or foolhardy.

As indicated earlier the governance of Australian education has been evolving away from the prescribed and neat separation of national and State and Territory responsibilities as set down by the authors of the Constitution. The evolution towards a more national approach to education has accelerated in the years of the Howard Government. This is occurring at a time of more general debate over the changing nature of the federation, especially the increasing centralism and growth of national government power. Many commentators, national politicians, and some State and Territory leaders see an amended federalism as necessary in order to achieve a more effective, coherent, and efficient response to emerging national

issues such as water and energy policy, security coordination, control of the economy and an increasingly stressed health system.

In education the expression of a more national approach is unmistakable. It is evident in a growing number of initiatives and policy shifts. The *National Goals for Schooling in Australia in the Twenty-First Century* represent a recognition by all education ministers of the need to work together to set and achieve goals. These were collaboratively developed by both the States and Territories and the national government and grew from the first attempt at national goals in 1989. They have become the template against which all State and Territory education systems as well as the Catholic Education and independent schools systems now measure their work and report on their achievements nationally. However, the National Goals are deliberately broad and have left the different systems free to autonomously deal with the myriad of operational matters such as curriculum, assessment, standards, teacher quality, school management and the like. What has emerged since, however, is an increasingly proactive national government that is seeking to find ways and means to implement more national and unified approaches to key areas in school education such as literacy and numeracy standards, quality teaching and most recently a more consistent curriculum across the States and Territories in priority areas.

Curriculum in particular has been and still is a zealously guarded function and responsibility of the State and Territories but here, too, the Federal Government has developed a more interventionist role. In many respects it is a leadership role and national governments of both major party political persuasions have shown a willingness to attempt to exert influence on school curricula "in the national interest".

The innovative civics and citizenship education project planned by the centre-left Labor government of Paul Keating is a good illustration of the approach. Keating's government initiated the programme just prior to its election defeat in 1996. It developed from a government-commissioned study that concluded Australian schools were generally failing to address the need for students to know, understand and participate in their democracy as informed and active citizens. The newly elected conservative government of Howard refashioned the initiative into the *Discovering Democracy* civics and citizenship education programme. Eight years and over $32 million later, by 2004, the programme was credited as having put civics and citizenship back into the curricula of all government and non-government school systems.

Civics is not the only such story but it is indicative of the ways and means by which national governments in Australia have been attempting to make an impact in a jurisdiction from which they have been constitutionally excluded. One of the strategies used to promote national approaches in education has been to develop a Statement or Framework designed to guide school implementation in a particular priority. This has occurred in such diverse priority areas as environment education, drug education, studies of Asia, Australia, and languages, safe schools, and family – school partnerships. Once developed, usually through a long and arduous consultative process, the Statement or Framework is considered, amended and finally agreed to by the Australian Government's Minister for Education and all of the

State and Territory Education Ministers at the annual meeting of the Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). In this way, and by this authority, national approaches find their way into local school systems, school consciousness and, eventually, educational practice. In addition, the national government will often support the priority through its capacity and willingness to fund major national teacher professional development programmes as well as curriculum materials production and distribution to schools.

In the last five years the Federal Government has also embarked on the more contentious strategy of issuing direct funding to schools through specific grants to support a particular priority area. Most recently this approach has been used in national programmes to improve education outcomes for boys, to support literacy tuition and to foster student engagement in mathematics, science, and technology. Some critics have expressed concern at this trend and see it as a way by which the Australian Government circumvents difficult or resistant State and Territory education systems to implement policy through the back door.

With this historical background as a backdrop, on 22 June 2004 the Prime Minister and the Minister for Education, Science and Training jointly announced the Australian Government's national education priorities that would "shape schooling over the next decade". It clearly illustrated the mix of leadership, consultation and the stick-and-carrot approaches of encouraging the States and Territories to achieve them. The four-year $31.3 billion funding bundle was made available to the State and Territory partners on condition that they agreed to a range of national initiatives designed to remove "the rail gauge" problem in Australian education. The metaphor was a pointed allusion to one of the dysfunctions in the Australian colonies prior to federation in 1901 where each colony had developed separate railway systems using different gauge rails. This parochial difference meant efficient inter-colonial rail travel was impossible. The lack of a uniform railway gauge became a major argument used to encourage the colonists to vote for federation.

A century further on the Australian Government was working with a similar problem: trying to find a more uniform-gauge national approach within separate systems of education. The most potent leverage it had available was the use of its budget. Accordingly the joint statement declared that "to receive funding for the next four years" the States and Territories and school authorities would have to agree to a range of conditions. These included, for example, implementing a common school starting age by 2010, common Statements of Learning in priority curriculum areas which States and Territories must build into their own curricula by 2008, national tests in the key subject areas of English, Mathematics, Science and Civics and Citizenship, school reports written in plain language and national numeracy and literacy tests reported to parents against national benchmarks. The Statements of Learning were initiated by State and Territory ministers. However, exemplifying the trend towards a more centralist approach, the Australian Government linked quadrennium funding to the States and Territories to the completion and implementation of the Statements within certain timeframes. Finally, among this list of conditions the Federal Government required that "Every school

must also have a functioning flag-pole, fly the Australian flag and display the values education framework in a prominent place in the school" (DEST 2004).

Despite some initial hesitation and procrastination all States and Territories agreed to accept the terms of the Federal Government's agenda and its conditional funding with some exceptions to parts of the agenda in some States and Territories. The joint statement succinctly highlights how, by 2004, values education had become part of the new national education priorities. It also clearly shows how it was part of a number of agendas at work, including the move to greater national uniformity in education and the quest for more national government influence in Australian schooling. There were others at play as well.

2.4 The Changing Economic and Social Landscape

By the very nature of values education, what it is and what it means, we might expect that the values education initiative in Australia would reflect other wider developments beyond the tussles over trends in education funding and political control.

The initiative brings to the fore some fundamental issues arising from significant changes in Australian society. These include the changing face of Australia's economy, its population, its social make-up, its preoccupations and its place in the world.

Economically over the last ten years Australia has been experiencing an unprecedented period of growth and prosperity. Fuelled by a breathtaking mineral resources boom, surging stock market and real estate values, diversified trade and major productivity changes wrought during the 1990s, there has been a significant growth in the nation's wealth. Australia has achieved near full employment and the lowest levels of unemployment in 30 years. A significant feature of this growth is that it has been sustained within a climate of benign low inflation and low interest rates.

However, there have been downsides and costs to this economic flourish. Australia's tariff reductions and adoption of a more open trade policy in the global market-place have seen a prolonged deterioration in the balance of payments and the deterioration of the domestic manufacturing industry. And, unlike other similar periods of economic prosperity and boom, the new wealth has been less equitably distributed. A recent National Social Trends report highlighted how the top 20% of the Australian population now owned 60% of the nation's wealth and that the median level of family net wealth reflected "the relatively large proportion of households at the lower end of the wealth distribution" (ABS 2006a).

Another social feature of the economic environment, highlighted by the same report, is that employed Australians are working longer than in the previous two decades, with men working longer hours per week and more women working than ever before (53% in 2004 as against 40% in 1979). Families are also borrowing more than they earn to feed hungry mortgages and vigorous consumption of goods and services. Credit card debt has reached such levels that social commentators frequently issue dire warnings of what might happen if inflation or interest rates were to move from their recent low levels. In this context the Australian Government and

some banking corporations have turned to schools to encourage financial management and financial literacy education for the nation's young student consumers.

The concern for youth in a time of pressured prosperity goes well beyond the worry about their financial management skills. Recent social research points to the need to empower young people to think deeply about the values they should really treasure and not simply focus on the values which they are sometimes led to believe will bring them success and happiness in this society. Social policy analyst Richard Eckersley, from the Australian National University, has commented that young Australians frequently think that cynicism, mistrust, impatience, materialism, and detachment are the values most likely to ensure success. Eckersley's studies also show higher rates of major depression in this generation (Generation Y) than previous ones, and that Generation Y is also experiencing increased malaise. Eckersley has linked an excessive emphasis on materialism and extrinsic goals to dissatisfaction, depression, anxiety, anger, social alienation, and poorer personal relationships (Eckersley 2004, p. 4). All of these are associated with lower overall well-being among young people (see also Eckersley 2001).

Such studies detail an Identikit picture of troubled contemporary youth in Australia. Other statistics on youth suicide, youth obesity, drug and substance abuse, disengagement in schooling and youth road fatalities and studies on the disengagement of young people from their communities and the political process all support the perception of a lower overall well-being among our young people. In response national policymakers believe schooling will increasingly need to provide students with resilience, life management skills, and the capacity for reflection and critical thought. These skills are regarded as being deeply rooted in enduring values. The responsibility to ensure students are taught the values that will guide them through life is seen to reside jointly with parents, educators, and the policymakers themselves.

The challenge and urgency of such a task is magnified by the manifest uncertainties of a global environment made more insecure and imponderable post 11 September 2001. Australia and its people have been very much involved in the rise of "global terrorism" both as victims and as respondents. Australian citizens have died and others have suffered deeply from several terror attacks in Bali and in London. The Australian Government has committed the nation militarily to the "war against terror" in Iraq and Afghanistan. Domestic legislation has been passed to strengthen laws for detaining and charging suspected terrorists. Billboards and posters in the metropolitan railway stations urge daily commuters to be on the lookout for suspicious activity.

The faces of those commuters bespeak a further complexity as they reflect the changing face of an increasingly diverse multicultural Australian population. This significant demographic change has been fostered by a national immigration policy which in the last ten years has been tested and redefined by the 2001 "*Tampa* incident", the mandatory detention of "illegal" asylum seekers, the ugly inter-ethnic violence at Cronulla in Sydney in the summer of 2005–2006 and the public debate about the nature of our multiculturalism and the nature of what it means to be Australian.

In the face of such tests the Australian Prime Minister, in his address to the National Press Club on the eve of Australia Day 2006, celebrated Australia's social cohesion as its "crowning achievement". "No country," said Mr. Howard, "has

absorbed as many people from as many nations and as many cultures as Australia and has done it so well." But here also is the challenge: "In the 21st century, maintaining our social cohesion will remain the highest test of the Australian achievement. It demands the best Australian ideals of tolerance and decency, as well as the best Australian traditions of realism and of balance." And the role of values in this national test is seen as critical. "Australian ethnic diversity is one of the enduring strengths of our nation," he remarked. "Yet our celebration of diversity must not be at the expense of the common values that bind us together as one people – respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual, a commitment to the rule of law, the equality of men and women and a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need. Nor should it be at the expense of ongoing pride in what are commonly regarded as the values, traditions, and accomplishments of the old Australia. A sense of shared values is our social cement. Without it we risk becoming a society governed by coercion rather than consent. That is not an Australia any of us would want to live in" (Howard 2006, pp. 3–4).

In this way values have become very much a part of an ongoing public dialogue about what it means to be "Australian", Australia's role in the world and how to maintain a cohesive civil society. In this way, too, they have also become part of the educational expression of the wider "cultural wars" where postmodernism, deconstructionism and the attendant notions of subjective relativism have been increasingly challenged by a wish to restore more traditional notions of knowledge and objective certainties. The struggle can be seen in the revision of approaches to Australian history, literacy, and the teaching of English. In this context the Australian Government's agenda for values education in schooling, as well as seeking to build healthy, resilient and responsible young Australians, has taken on a societal purpose, perhaps a more risky and contentious purpose, of building a sense of nation and national identity based on "Australian values" to nurture a cohesive civil society. The two purposes have sat awkwardly and uncomfortably alongside each other often arousing competing tensions.

3 The Values Education Study: The Genesis of the National Values Education Initiative

3.1 Beginnings

The Australian Government's national initiative in values education really begins with the Values Education Study. The then Australian Government Minister for Education Science and Training, Dr. Brendan Nelson MP, took the proposal for a study to all the State and Territory ministers of education at the 19 July 2002 meeting of the MCEETYA. He sought their endorsement for a study that would provide advice on how to approach values education in Australian schools. Minister Nelson expressed a strong personal commitment to the idea and succeeded in securing the other ministers' support.

The MCEETYA agreement noted the holistic view of education that underpinned the study's purpose. "Education," it said, "is as much about building character as it is about equipping students with specific skills" and values-based education could "strengthen students" self-esteem, optimism and commitment to fulfilment as well as "help students exercise ethical judgement and social responsibility". The rationale went further and recognised that values education in schools was also necessary because "parents expect schools to help students understand and develop personal and social responsibilities" (DEST 2004, p. 3). The issue of what parents expected of schools in values education was to become a source of lively public debate in the aftermath of the study.

Following MCEETYA agreement, the Australian Government's Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) commissioned Curriculum Corporation, a not-for-profit national education services company owned by all ministers of education, to design and manage the work. The defined purpose of the Values Education Study was to examine current practice of how schools conducted values education, to provide an informed basis for promoting improved values education in Australian schools and, finally, to make recommendations to the Australian Government on the ways to strengthen the place of values education in Australian schools (DEST 2003). At the behest of DEST, Curriculum Corporation established a project advisory committee of representatives from key national education stakeholders to advise on the Study.

Curriculum Corporation took a three-pronged approach to the work. To develop data it used school-based values education projects funded by special grants, a literature search on national and international approaches to values education, and an online survey conducted with a sample of school communities across Australia. The Study was conducted between September 2002 and May 2003.

The Values Education Study (VES) was unique. Such a national study, commissioned by the national government, had never been attempted before in Australia. Some States and Territories had developed their own initiatives and Western Australia especially had undertaken ground-breaking work in values education during the 1990s. But a national approach was radical. As such it initially met a predictably high degree of caution and cynicism from sections of the education community. Some State and Territory government education systems' officers and some teacher organisations were suspicious of the politics at play in such a highly sensitive domain of education. Some in the independent schools sector, especially some faith-based schools, even saw the venture as a waste of time and resources. As one representative from a faith-based school acerbically commented to Curriculum Corporation, "We have been 'doing' values education in this country for a couple of hundred years. It is the bread and butter of our work. Why come offering us government grants to show us how to do it!"

3.2 The School-Based Action Research Values Education Projects

The general response from schools was much more positive. In answer to the Minister's invitation for schools to apply for VES project grants Curriculum

Corporation received nearly 600 applications involving over 700 schools from across the country. The grants, ranging from $7,000 and up to $21,000 for school clusters were to be allocated to support 50 innovative values education projects. The successful applications were selected through a three-stage competitive selection process. The 69 schools which finally took part in the 50 projects provided a rare insight into how Australian schools, as broadly represented by the selected group of project schools, were variously approaching values education, meeting challenges they faced and defining what sort of outcomes they sought in the project process (DEST 2003, pp. 41–43).

Their projects were eclectic and directly reflective of local needs and each school's level of development in values education. Some schools such as the Alice Springs High government school in the Northern Territory and Al Faisal College Islamic School in Sydney used their grant to apply values education to address student's well-being and behavioural issues. Others took the opportunity to review and consult on the values that they and their communities wished to apply across the whole school. Still others wanted their projects to develop specific values through their curricula and cross-curriculum programmes.

These three types of approaches to values education were evident in a number of the projects and were used as means of broadly categorising current practices. The Final report identified these approaches as:

1. Reviewing school values education processes
2. Building student resilience and well-being through values education
3. Providing specific values teaching and learning (DEST 2003, pp. 42–44, 47–56)

The Final Report highlighted a number of challenges faced by the VES project schools. On the practical level the project schools had a very short timeframe in which to do their work. They effectively had only five months in which to implement and report on their projects. This severe time constriction was a major limitation both for the schools and for the degree of conclusiveness that the Final Report might claim in the findings.

That limitation aside, the Study identified a range of educational challenges that schools were trying to address through values education. They reveal how values education was being used as a means of building student well-being and revitalising school cultures.

> The Study clearly demonstrates the will and desire of all participating school communities to utilise values-based education to enrich students' holistic development and to respond constructively and positively to a range of contemporary schooling challenges. Some of the challenges addressed by schools in the Study include: how to increase student engagement and belonging and minimise student disconnection to schooling; how to tackle violence, anti-social and behaviour management issues; how to improve student and staff health and well-being; how to foster improved relationships; how to build student resilience as an antidote to youth suicide and youth substance abuse; how to encourage youth civic participation; how to foster student empowerment; [*and*] how to improve whole-school cultures. . . . (DEST 2003, p. 11)

The project schools encountered specific philosophical challenges arising from the nature of values education itself. This included the wide discourse over the question

of what was actually meant by "values education" as a domain of school activity. The questions of definitions, naming, and meaning also permeated the hotter debate about identifying the key values that Australian schools ought to foster, the "What values?" and "Whose values?" questions. These issues underscored the broader need to establish a common language in which Australian education communities could have a more fruitful discourse about values education.

There was also the issue of how to go about the teaching of values in schools. The project schools grappled with the debate about whether values could be addressed explicitly in schools, especially in teaching and learning activity, or only implicitly through modelling and through cognitive development methods such as values clarification. They were also tested with other questions about the role of the teacher, the nature of the parent–school relationship in values education, the developmental stages in the child's ethical growth and the vexed issue of how to identify (and even measure?) the outcomes of school-based values education. Many of these issues were echoed in the literature review which formed part of the VES (DEST 2003, pp. 33–37).

3.3 The Final Report and Recommendations

The *Values Education Study – Final Report* was released and published in August 2003. It provided a list of seven recommendations and included a *Draft National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* (DEST 2003*)*. This Draft Framework encapsulated the findings of the Study and provided a pathway to further development. It was the chrysalis from which the Australian Government's inquiry about values education in schools would metamorphose into a concerted national programme of action.

The VES Final Report showed that while many government and non-government schools were doing good work in values education, comprehensive values education was still at an early stage in Australian schools. Much more could be done to strengthen values education in schools. However, schools in the study reported "an increased willingness and capacity to address values and values education in a much more explicit way or, at the very least, raised awareness of the need to do so" (DEST 2003, p. 56).

Importantly, the VES Final Report did not try to claim too much. It was conscious that the VES was not a definitive work and never pretended to be such. Accordingly the Report only claimed "to provide a snapshot of practices and approaches" and to produce results that were described as "instructive" (DEST 2003, p. 1). It was instructive enough, however, to glean from the project schools and school surveys a high degree of commonality in the core values to pursue in schools. And it was instructive enough to identify some guiding principles about what might constitute effective values education practice in schools. However, the Final Report made its claims with a healthy tentativeness and caution which was reflected in the Draft Framework. For example the "Key Elements and Approaches to Inform Good Practice" were "not intended to be exhaustive, but provide examples of good practice to guide schools in creating and maintaining values education

programs" (DEST 2003, p. 13). The Final Report recommendations included a set of ten shared values but was careful to point out that the list of proposed ten common values "have emerged from Australian school communities" and were offered as "schools may wish to use them as 'discussion starters' for working with their communities on values education".

In these ways the VES Final Report and the Draft Framework took the first tentative steps to present some consensus on a vision for values education in Australian schools, a set of guiding principles to support schools enacting that vision and, most audaciously of all, a set of ten common shared values that all Australian schools might foster. Although tentative, the Draft Framework was a bold attempt to synthesise the school experiences and research of the Study and provide a means of finding national agreement on the place of values education in Australian schools.

Despite its limitations the Values Education Study was a critical step in laying the foundations for the national initiative. Firstly, it did this by simply enabling, fostering and encouraging the "values education conversation" at a local school level, at a jurisdictional or school system level and at a national level. This conversation and its associated debates have taken values education from the quiet periphery of Australian education to a more vocalised and rowdy centre of consciousness. The schools have clearly enjoyed and profited from the discussion and the talk has spread and taken hold. Secondly, VES identified in both the school grant projects and in the online survey research some significant levels of broad agreement on the sort of values Australian schools might foster. It also offered other key definitions that have helped bridge the potential quagmire of semantics and enabled the momentum to continue. In addition it found some agreement on the positive impact that focused values education could have on student development, general agreement on the importance of engaging the whole school community in values education implementation and strong agreement on the need for resources and teacher professional development in values education. And lastly, VES, through its recommendations and the Draft Framework, established the mechanisms and processes through which the stakeholders in Australia's complex school systems might eventually negotiate other agreements and actions in values education.

4 Controversy and Consensus: The National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools

4.1 The Controversy over Values in Schools

The *Values Education Study – Final Report* was published online in November 2003. Several months later, in January 2004, a vigorous and vociferous national debate erupted when the Prime Minister publicly suggested that parents were increasingly choosing to send their children to private non-government schools because government schools were, or had become, "too politically correct and too

values-neutral". The comments sparked vehement criticism and rejections from some parent groups, teacher unions, private school principals and Opposition parties. It raised the issue of government funding for the private school system and drew the claim from one major newspaper that, "this is all about Mr. Howard's view that there is an ongoing cultural war. It is not that schools are values-neutral but rather that he does not like the values taught in schools – public and private" (*The Age* 2004).

The VES Final Report and the Draft Framework had explicitly acknowledged the premise that "in *all* contexts schools promote, foster and transmit values to *all* students" and "that schools are not value-free or value-neutral zones of social and educational engagement" (DEST 2003, p. 12). The Study itself was cited in the controversy (Haywood 2004). A danger was emerging that the initiative to strengthen values education in schools could be derailed by the politics and intensity of the values debate. The episode highlighted how politically sensitive values education had become in Australia. If the new values education initiative in schools was to be taken seriously and not dismissed out of hand as a political ploy, the work had to be handled with extreme care. In this context the Draft Framework provided the means to navigate such difficult terrain. It provided a careful balance between substantive guidance and direction on the one hand and the openness for further consultation and development on the other.

This degree of openness, the way the ten shared values were offered as "discussion starters", the avoidance of prescription, the careful attempt to qualify the key findings, and the recommendation for further consultation provided the way forward. Enough had been done in the VES to synthesise a vision, some guiding principles and a set of core values, but as the Report itself recommended,

> it would seem sensible . . . to allow further time for development and consultation before a more detailed Framework is proposed, based on the Principles outlined in this report. (DEST 2003, p. 17)

In retrospect this was very wise advice.

4.2 Towards a Consensus

In March 2004, only weeks after the politically charged atmosphere of the values-in-schools debate, a copy of the Draft Framework was sent to every school in the country for comment. The feedback was gathered by Curriculum Corporation and used by the DEST to inform the development of a final National Framework.

At the same time, and in line with the recommendations of the VES Final Report, the Australian Government funded the first national forum in values education. Held in Melbourne in late April 2004, the Values Education in Action Forum invited educators from around the country to explore good practice through a showcase of 12 case study schools from the VES and to discuss future directions for values education.

The *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* (DEST 2005) finally emerged following some revision after the national consultation on the draft. Few and relatively minor changes were made. There was some rewording in the descriptors of the values and the list of ten core values was reduced to nine when "Being ethical" was deleted as it was seen as a collective of the others. After a contextual preamble the final Framework offered a structure with four main components:

1. The *Vision* for values education in Australian schools
2. The nine *Values for Australian Schooling*
3. *Guiding Principles* for effective values education, and
4. *Key Elements and Approaches that Inform Good Practice*

The *Context* preamble describes the sort of education challenges that an improved approach to values education could address. These challenges reflected broader social changes and were part of the context initially identified by Values Education Study schools. They spoke of increasing student engagement, promoting improved relationships, building student resilience and improving the cultures of schools (DEST 2005, p. 3). Most evident is the strong focus on values education as an agent for improving student health and well-being and providing students with a more positive and empowering school experience.

The *Vision* declared that

All Australian schools will provide values education in a planned and systematic way, by:

- Articulating, in consultation with their school community, the school's mission/ethos;
- Developing student responsibility in local, national and global contexts and building student resilience and social skills;
- Ensuring values are incorporated into school policies and teaching programs across the key learning areas; and
- Reviewing the outcomes of their values education practices.

(DEST 2005, p. 3)

Student development outcomes were clearly at the heart of the business. The way to nurture the heart was through an explicit systematic approach that was inclusive of the whole school community and whole school life.

The nine *Values for Australian Schooling* are named as:

- Care and compassion
- Doing your best
- Fair go
- Freedom
- Honesty and trustworthiness
- Integrity
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Understanding, tolerance and inclusion

(DEST 2005, p. 4)

Interestingly, they are presented in the finished National Framework no longer as "discussion starters" but as nine values for Australian schooling that "have emerged from Australian school communities". As Susan Pascoe (2005, p. 18) has said: "The nine Values for Australian Schooling are a mix of democratic virtues, ethical dispositions, personal attributes and learning principles." Whatever their character, these values were now the values the National Framework wanted Australian schools to foster.

The Guiding Principles highlight and synthesise what was learnt from the educational practice of the VES projects. They articulate *what* it is that constitutes effective values education. According to the following précis of the Principles, effective values education is that which:

- Helps students to understand and to be able to apply the core shared values
- Is an explicit goal and explicit activity of schooling
- Articulates the values of the school community
- Applies these values consistently in word and action in all the practices of the school
- Occurs in partnership with students, staff, families and the school community as part of a whole school approach
- Is presented in a safe and supportive environment in which students can comfortably explore their own and others' values
- Is delivered by well-trained and resourced teachers who use a variety of different approaches to values education
- Is included within the provision of curriculum and co-curriculum programmes
- Regularly reviews approaches and monitors intended outcomes

These principles clearly reflect the lessons from the VES, which argued that *effective* values education needs to be explicit, to be a partnership with families, to be consistent and evident in modelling, to demonstrate a correspondence between word and deed, to be congruent through all aspects of school life and culture, to involve all teachers, and to be negotiated and relevant to local circumstances.

The Key Elements and Approaches That Inform Good Practice suggest strategies and approaches of *how* effective values education can be implemented. In particular it features six pathways or areas which are described as "not exhaustive" but simply as examples "to guide schools in implementing values education":

1. School planning
2. Partnerships within the school community
3. A whole school approach
4. A safe and supportive learning environment
5. Support for students, and
6. Quality teaching. (DEST 2003, p. 3)

The *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* required one more step in consultation before it could become an active instrument of education policy. The Federal Minister needed the State and Territory education ministers' endorsement. In early 2005, all State and Territory ministers of education agreed on

the final form of the Framework. The document was immediately distributed to all Australian schools together with a large format poster of the nine Values for Australian Schooling. The National Framework, with its Vision, Values for Australian Schooling, Guiding Principles and Key Elements That Inform Good Practice, has now become the blueprint for a consistent approach and commitment to the implementation of values education in Australian schools.

4.3 Critical Responses

The release of the National Framework did not attract a great deal of public notice. Unsurprisingly, it has been the set of nine core values espoused by schools that have preoccupied the critics and commentators in their responses to the document.

Debate about the values was ignited by the poster of the Values for Australian Schooling which the Minister had sent to all schools. The poster was headed by the Australian flag and carried within it the iconic image of Private John Simpson and his donkey helping a wounded digger on the slopes of Gallipoli in 1915. The image, well known in Australia as part of the history and mythology of the nation's ANZAC experiences in World War I, was the Minister's personal choice but was stridently criticised by some as creating an inappropriate association with values of war, "blokey" heroes, jingoism and old-world views. At the National Values Education Forum in May 2005 the Minister staunchly defended the choice as capturing the timeless values of care, compassion, courage, and selflessness.

The issue went deeper than the choice of an image. As recounted earlier, in mid-2004 the national government decided to tie States' and Territories' education funding grants to a set of preconditions which included agreement that every jurisdictional school would have an operational flagpole and the *Values for Australian Schooling* poster on prominent public display. Such an approach further fuelled the charge that the Federal Government's values initiative was fostering a conservative political agenda for the restoration of "traditional Australian" values. Historian Anna Clark, co-author of *The History Wars*, objected to "the ways in which these national symbols have been co-opted into a divisive and politicised contest over Australia's identity" and concluded that "the nationalisation of teaching so-called 'values' is a potent political manoeuvre, but one that rests on a construction of unified national identity premised on division" (Clark 2005, pp. 108–109). Critics from another quarter paradoxically contended that the real problem with the approach of the "common Australian values" [*sic*] in the National Framework is that they are too vague, empty and too open to conflicting interpretations (Knight & Collins 2006, p. 3).

Unfortunately, this focus in the values debate has distorted the reality of what the National Framework is trying to do. First, there has been the convenient but careless slide from the notion of "Values for Australian Schooling" to talk about "Australian values". There is a vast conceptual difference here and attaching nationalising labels to the values was never part of the Values Education Study work and nor has it been part of the programme that has followed since. It might be part of the

political chatter and banter but the task of defining, describing and prescribing "national" values has not been part of the national initiative. The Values for Australian Schooling are based on the National Goals for Schooling and are those which have been prioritised by Australian school communities themselves. They are not specifically described as particular or unique "Australian values" but rather as a statement of the common shared values that "are part of Australia's common democratic way of life" and that "reflect our commitment to a multicultural and environmentally sustainable society where all are entitled to justice" (DEST 2005, p. 4).

Second, the focus on the nine values has neglected the other critical educational braces which are integral to the Framework structure: the Guiding Principles and the Key Elements of Good Practice. It is only when you take all the buttresses together that you develop a true picture of what the Framework is and how it might work. What stands out most immediately in that picture is that it is a *framework* and not a cage. It is an open, flexible structure on which to build real school-based values education activity, not a rigid enclosure of prescriptive dogmas in which to constrain values education development and impose hard and fast standardised approaches. The National Framework attempts a delicate balance between enough openness to enable local adaptation and flexibility on the one hand and a measure of definite guidance and structure to foster commonality and support for good education practice on the other.

In this context the Values for Australian Schooling and the National Framework go well beyond Simpson and his donkey and the cultural wars. The named values need to be read and understood in conjunction with these other planks of the National Framework; they need to be treated as part of an integrated educational structure operating and deriving their meaning in live local school communities. Perhaps it was only the schools and the implementation of the National Framework in school practice that was going to really demonstrate how the National Framework could work and take the reform in values education beyond the bear pit of political contests.

5 Making Values a Core Part of Schooling: The National Values Education Programme 2004–2008

5.1 A Plan of Action

The Australian Government declared values education a national priority in the May budget in 2004 when $29.7 million was allocated for the implementation of a values education programme. The task of the programme was described as "Making Values a Core Part of Schooling" (DEST 2004). In a joint statement in June 2004 the Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Science and Training jointly announced legislation to fund Australian schools with $31 billion over four years. Although politicised by the conditional requirement that "Every school must

have a functioning flagpole, fly the Australian flag and display the values framework in a prominent place in the school" the funding offered an unprecedented opportunity for implementation of strengthening values education in Australian schools (DEST 2004) (see also Clarke A. 2006). Even the antithetical Australian Education Union (AEU), who initially dismissed the Values for Life initiative as "essentially an attempt at a bit of window dressing following the backlash against Howard's previous attempt to suggest that public schools were valueless", conceded that "any additional money will be welcomed and put to good use!" (AEU 2004, p. 1).

The national values education programme was to be funded over four years to provide:

- Values education forums in every school in Australia involving parents and the whole school community
- Grants for schools to develop and showcase good practice approaches in line with a national framework on values education
- Annual national values education forums to review and share the work and advise on new directions
- A dedicated website and a series of curriculum and professional learning resources for all schools to teach values
- National activities such as partnership projects with national parent, teacher, school principal and teacher educator organisations

This is a multifaceted programme which aims to foster values education and embed new practice at the school level across all schools in Australia. It is a comprehensive and inclusive programme characterised by the use of broad-based ongoing consultations, the involvement of all major stakeholders and the determination to foster and learn from grassroots school-based practice. In spite of the political whirlwinds that have frequently beset the values education initiative, the programme is deliberately democratic and educationally centred in school communities and in school professional practice. While the highest level of political leadership has been instrumental in its inception, while national funding is critical, while jurisdictional support is crucial and while the National Framework is the primary guide, ultimately it will be the schools that really determine what values education will eventually take root and the schools that say how it will happen.

5.2 Implementation of the National Framework

Implementation of the national Values Education programme began immediately in 2004.

The Australian Government negotiated with States' and Territories' jurisdictions as well as the non-governments school authorities to commence values education forums in each school in Australia. Schools were to receive a small grant for the activity and had four years to conduct their forum. It is an ambitious plan to ensure local action and whole school engagement with the National Framework and the

values education agenda. Local jurisdictional support was going to be essential for its success or failure. The idea of local school-based forums arose from the original VES which asked project schools to conduct forums as part of their work. The project schools generally reported difficulty in engaging parents but they were unanimous in their call for the forums to happen. Given the place of values in the development of children and the primary role of families in shaping values, they concluded that values education at school had to be an active partnership with parents and caregivers.

Curriculum Corporation was engaged to manage several other major components of the programme. The first was to conduct the Values Education Good Practice Schools – Stage 1 project, a school grants programme where school clusters from around the country were to be selected and funded to conduct values education projects to identify and implement good practice using the *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools*. The good practice they identified was to be disseminated to all Australian schools. As with the VES, a national project advisory committee, made up from key national stakeholder groups, was established to guide the project.

In early 2005 the Minister for Education, Science and Training invited all Australian schools to apply for funding to undertake the values education projects. Schools were invited to form clusters of four to ten schools, to design projects and to apply in a competitive selection process for funding grants ranging from $15,000 to $90,000. From the applications 26 projects were to be selected for funding through a three-stage, criteria-based selection process. In the last stage a National Selection Committee, chaired by Curriculum Corporation, selected and recommended a list of projects for DEST and ministerial approval in May 2005.

These cluster school projects involved 166 schools who conducted their work over a 12-month period from April 2005 to April 2006. As the Stage 1 Project Manager, Curriculum Corporation provided a range of supports including a series of three one-and-a-half day residential briefing sessions. At the briefing sessions project cluster school coordinators came together with Curriculum Corporation project staff, States' and Territories' values education officers, DEST representatives and critical friends to discuss aspects of project delivery, share accounts of progress and to explore values education issues arising from the work. The briefings showed how the projects were fostering a widening community of learners around values education.

The critical friends were an important part of that community. They were from an innovative network of university-based education advisers, the University Associates Network (UAN), which Curriculum Corporation had specifically convened to assist the values education project schools. The University of Newcastle and the Australian Catholic University led and coordinated the UAN, which came to include selected staff from faculties of education in 17 universities. Each of the successful clusters was offered the assistance of a critical friend drawn from the network to work with throughout the project. These critical friends assisted the clusters with data-gathering and the research aspects of the project as well as providing professional advice about approaches to project implementation and quality

teaching. Many of them became very deeply and personally involved with the projects and played significant roles in making projects successful.

The 26 good practice schools projects covered a range of topics and approaches to values education. They included teaching values through philosophy, exploring values through Indigenous education, integrating values into Key Learning Areas (KLA) teaching and learning using programmes to build resilience and self-esteem in students and introducing service learning. Some clusters used student action teams, environmental education programmes, and peer support initiatives. The overall emphasis was on school communities working together to implement and describe good practice in values education. The cluster led by St. Charles Borromeo Primary School in Victoria, for example, set up inter-school Student Action Teams around each of the nine core values. These teams took responsibility for developing options for action around each of the values.

Project clusters were required to submit interim reports and then a final report to Curriculum Corporation in April 2006. These accounts were used to inform the development of the Final Report which was submitted to the DEST in August 2006. When released, the findings of the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project–Stage 1 will be used to inform the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project–Stage 2, which will be conducted in 2006–2008.

Another strategy being used to support values education becoming a core part of schooling is to provide all schools with quality curriculum and professional learning resorces for values education. The need for resources was identified in the VES.

To address this need in 2005 the Australian Government contracted Curriculum Corporation to develop a designated values education web site and produce the *Values for Australian Schooling Kit* – primary and secondary versions (DEST 2006). The kit contained material to support schools in conducting their local values education forums and information for the professional development of teachers. The website has been launched and provides an ongoing dynamic portal for all schools and educators to connect with the events, developments, resources, ideas, and outcomes of the values education initiative. More print and online resources are planned for the next three years to support the growing dialogue and knowledge base about values education in Australian schools. The focus of the new materials will include the integration of values education across all KLAs in the school curriculum, the integration of values education into school cultures, values education approaches to support student well-being and personal development and other resources to develop stronger inter-cultural understanding. All these materials will be distributed free to every school in the country and will be published online.

In addition to school-focused activity the values education programme is reaching out to the broader education community. The Federal Government's DEST has engaged relevant associations in partnership projects to conduct national activities and promote the latest developments in values education to their members. The Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council (representing school principals), the Australian Joint Council of Professional Teacher Associations (representing teachers), the Australian Council of Deans of Education (representing teacher educators), the Australian Council of State School

Organisations and the Australian Parents Council (representing parents) are all conducting values education projects funded by the programme.

Finally, the programme brings together many participants from all this intense and diverse activity for two days once a year at a national values education forum. The national forums have been funded for the life of the programme and are designed to create an opportunity for key stakeholders, invited guest presenters, teachers, students, government representatives and other participants to discuss and review the programme work, to exchange ideas and to advise the Federal DEST about possible future directions. The annual forum reports offer an invaluable window into the evolution of the programme and, ultimately, will contribute to its final evaluation.

5.3 Some Conclusions

Australia's national values education initiative is now at midpoint in its lifespan. Are we any closer to realising the vision splendid, to making values a core part of schooling? Are we achieving the strengthening of values education in schooling, making it more planned and systematic? Are schools better at building the character of our students?

It is too early to draw any definitive conclusions. In truth, the best part of this story has yet to unfold. Nonetheless, as a participant in the narrative, and with the cautionary qualifications that perspective demands, this writer suggests the national initiative in values education can claim some significant outcomes.

The most notable of these has been the development of a very real and broad national commitment to the values education initiative among the many diverse players of the Australian education community, despite the contentious and difficult nature of this domain of education. Credit for this lies in the use of a broad, inclusive and consistent step-by-step consultative approach by the DEST and by its contractors, such as Curriculum Corporation. It is also this mechanism and this approach to the management that has largely sheltered the initiative from any potentially mortal damage arising from the political storms that have raged around values education in the past few years.

The negotiated *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* is a direct product of that process and would have to rank as a significant achievement in itself. Although not a flawless document, the National Framework has provided a genuine national approach to values education. As a guide and template for values education in schooling, with its nine values and guidelines, the National Framework has provided reasonable and creditable (though still contestable) answers to the obstructive and difficult questions faced by the VES. In doing so it has enabled movement forward. Also, the National Framework, and the dialogue that has been generated around it, has provided some common language in which to conduct the discourse about values education. Most importantly it has provided a credible mechanism on which all schools and school systems can build and test their own values education developments.

Another achievement is the level and breadth of activity that is happening now in values education. The government-funded programme which is supporting the implementation of the National Framework has generated a huge amount of momentum and engagement in values education across the Australian school system. Each and every school is being asked to take action on values education. The Good Practice School projects, the partnerships projects, the forums and the resources development are engaging thousands of educators and stakeholders in the "values education conversation". The conversation is growing, broadening and deepening at the local, jurisdictional and national level. It is becoming more confident and certain, more sophisticated and more positive. Some of the core issues that dogged the earlier tentative debate on values education – the question of which values, the question of explicitness, the question of values-free schooling and the question of all teachers being values educators – have now largely been put to rest by consensus.

The Values Education Good Practice Schools (VEGPS) – Stage 1 project has produced stronger cluster school projects than the original VES, and indicators suggest these have yielded some powerful results. With more time, more dollars and the benefit of VES learning and the National Framework, the VEGPS Stage 1 projects have been better focused, more sophisticated and more productive. Initial analysis for the final report reveals a stronger certainty about the preconditions for effective values education: the importance of whole school strategies, leadership, explicitness, modelling, negotiation of the values, a shared values language and the necessity of proper time and professional learning for teachers. There is not yet so much certainty about student outcomes in broad terms but plenty of micro-incident evidence and case writing which identifies better engagement, healthier relationships, stronger school connection and better learning for students. There is growing evidence, too, of the significant impacts on teachers – reappraisals of teaching practice, powerful collegiate sharing, changing teaching practice and changing school cultures.

Finally, it is worth noting that the national programme is benefiting from the growing integration and synergies that are occurring between the various components of the programme and its many stakeholders. The links and exchanges that are occurring between the universities, the schools, the VEGPS managers, resources developers, teacher associations and parent organisations are generating efficiencies, more coherence, clearer messages and richer professional depth to the evolving work. Notably, in the Australian Council of Deans of Education project, led by Professor Terry Lovat, some of the UAN universities have worked closely with selected Good Practice Schools to synthesise a rich set of case studies that demonstrate the emerging links between values education and quality teaching.

Obviously, the national values education initiative has a long way to travel before more definitive outcomes can be voiced. The evidence of the impact of the funded forums on local school communities is yet to be gathered. The second stage of the VEGPS project promises to deliver more insights into good practice but Stage 1 suggests the data gathering from these projects still needs be more coherent, consistent and refined if it is going to yield more definite conclusions about student and school

outcomes from values education. It seems reasonable to argue that if the vision is for stronger, more planned, more explicit and systematic values education in schools then we ought to be able to describe the outcome we might expect to see from that approach vs. the outcomes that we see from the unplanned, *ad hoc*, unstructured and implicit variety of values education. Also, on the issue of identifying outcomes, it is clear that at present there has not been sufficient time in the schools' projects to go beyond positing tentative "key findings". There is a case for setting up more longitudinal studies but such a proposal is not on the current programme agenda.

There are other important debates still to be had. The values, for example, are still an issue: how useful are the Values for Australian Schooling in school practice? How open to interpretation or closed and prescriptive are they? How far can schools go in negotiating local varieties? Another issue is how teachers and schools deal with and teach about values conflict in the classroom, in the school community and in the face of the contradictions in our society. Knight and Collins suggest, for example, that "we need to supplement the Common Values approach with a focus on a set of principles or procedures to guide us in dealing with clashes of values" (Knight & Collins 2006, p. 6).

These concerns are by no means exhaustive. There are many others but perhaps they ought not to distract from the wonderful woods that have flourished with the trees. Only five years ago Aspin, Chapman and Klenowski argued that the real issues of changing culture and values in Australian education had yet to be seriously addressed (Aspin et al. 2001). We have travelled a great distance since then. In Australia we are witnessing what Susan Pascoe has called a "slow renaissance" in values education (Pascoe 2006). That renaissance is rapidly gathering pace under the impetus created by the Australian Government's quest to make values education a core part of all schooling. We look forward to what the unfolding story will tell in another five years.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not represent the views of Curriculum Corporation nor the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training.

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