

## Reporting Values, Partnership with Parents, and the Hidden Curriculum: A Qualitative Study

Veronica Morcom  
Murdoch University

*Abstract: The Australian government funded the West Australian project 'Reporting Values to Parents' as part of 'The Values in Action Schools Project' (2009). The two aims of the qualitative study were to develop a common values language supported by observable behaviours and an appreciation that values education is fundamental to schooling. Teachers used an action research process to create authentic values activities and involve parents in the assessment process. Parents shifted their perspectives to ratify teachers' role to teach values explicitly. Students experienced a deeper sense of connection and belonging at school. Educators can adapt the activities in this paper to infuse values into their teaching. Future research is warranted to support and retain preservice teachers by examining the 'hidden curriculum' and personal biases to create inclusive classrooms. All students have a right to access an education that reflects their interests and values and teachers need urgent support for this quest.*

### Introduction

Schools are major institutions where students are educated and socialised to participate in Australia's democratic society. A teacher's traditional role is to focus on the academic outcomes at school. However, students also learn about cultural norms and values indirectly, which is referred to as the 'hidden curriculum' and includes all the non-academic schooling outcomes of schooling that significantly impact students' educational experience and academic success, particularly for Indigenous students whose voices may not consistently be recognised (Rahman, 2013; Sari & Doganay, 2009).

In the 1990s, there was a resurgence of interest in Values Education, and parents wanted to know what was happening in schools (Lovat & Toomey, 2007). In response, the government funded the National Values Initiative from 2003 to 2010. After consultation with community groups, nine core values underpinning Australia's democracy became the basis for The National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2005). The values were care and compassion, doing your best, freedom, fair go, honesty, trustworthiness, integrity, respect, responsibility, understanding, tolerance, and inclusion. To embed Values Education as an integral part of schooling all education ministers endorsed The Melbourne Declaration (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2008) and agreed to two educational goals for young Australians.

1. Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence.
2. All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, active and informed citizens.

A decade later, in 2019, The Melbourne Declaration was updated with The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Educational Declaration (Department of Education, Skills, and Employment [DESE], 2021) and the Aboriginal name 'Mparntwe' was used for Alice Springs. This was an essential step in recognising the Arrernte people as the traditional land owners (Gunawardena & Brown, 2021) and raising awareness for educators of their responsibility to build inclusive educational communities.

Before this update, substantial funding was provided across school sectors to realise the government's vision of providing a solid basis for implementing values Education in the Australian curriculum. Quality values education programs were already happening in schools (2005-2009) and were shared during three stages of funding for 'The Values Education Good Practice Schools Projects' (VEGPS, 2005-2006; 2006-2008) and 'The Values in Action Schools Project' (VASP, 2009).

The subject of this paper is the examination of the close-level work of teachers from the Western Australian project, Reporting Values to Parents, a new initiative funded through VASP. The two aims of the WA project were to develop a common values language supported by observable behaviours and an appreciation that values education is fundamental to good schooling. The finer details of the practical values activities that teachers designed were not detailed in the final VASP report (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2010), so they are elucidated in this paper as exemplars for other educators interested in teaching values explicitly.

The main benefits of the research were that teachers worked in partnership with parents to create activities that made explicit the values that students needed to be taught at school to develop critical thinking skills and effective collaboration. Parents realised teachers had a role, and their children were developing lifelong skills. The teachers were experienced and passionate about this project and enjoyed the collegialism of working with teachers from other schools. Parents also appreciated teachers' efforts, which, it is argued, improved relationships, and contributed to teachers' feeling valued and trusted as professionals.

The significance of this research is its relevance in today's educational climate, where there is a worldwide shortage of teachers due in part to the changing landscape of modern classrooms. This research demonstrates how to build positive professional partnerships between teachers and parents based on mutual respect and trust, which is argued to be central to keeping teachers in the profession. Future research is needed in preservice teachers' training to support their transition to the classroom, so they stay in the profession long-term. Values education is an effective tool to examine aspects of the 'hidden curriculum' that may preclude students from participating fully at school and developing a sense of belonging (Rahman, 2013). The practical activities teachers developed in this paper can be applied by other educators interested in developing ethical behaviour that can improve student outcomes and open values dialogue with families at school and in the home environment.

## **Background to the WA Project**

The three WA public schools were in the northern suburbs of Perth's metropolitan area and enjoyed high socioeconomic profiles. Many staff had long served at their school and built respect with the parent community but had yet to work together on projects such as VASP. Parents made assumptions that teachers did not teach values explicitly at school and that it was their domain. So, the WA project intended to reopen values dialogue with parents and highlight the importance of shared core values between school and home. One of the central tenets for gaining the funding was to involve parents in the project activities that teachers had yet to design. The nine-month timeline was short for developing new

teacher/parent partnerships and creating, implementing, and reviewing values activities to meet the final VASP objective of reporting the outcomes of high-quality Values Education programs for other educators to adapt to their schools.

The coordinator and author of this paper was a teacher/researcher who developed evidence-based social strategies to teach values explicitly and create democratic classrooms where students took responsibility to change antisocial behaviour and reduce bullying through explicit values education (Morcom, 2005, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016; Morcom & Cumming-Potvin, 2010). She also mentored experienced teachers in these practices (Morcom & MacCallum, 2022) before the VASP project so knew teachers would need time to come together as a group to create shared understandings before designing the activities. The funding was used to release teachers from the classroom for half a day every two weeks to create values activities while developing a supportive team that was deemed critical to the success of the project.

The ideas from previous research were adapted to the WA project for the school assemblies (rubrics) to meet the first aim of developing a common values language. The teachers developed the two community values events (fantasy machines and home-grown heroes) to meet the second aim, demonstrating to parents that teachers explicitly teach values as the foundation for group work and collaboration. The key events and data sources for the WA project are listed in Table 1 to illustrate the timeline over the three school terms and indicate how the project activities evolved. The project was launched in January, and teachers met for the first time at the end of February after the process of ethics clearance was finalised.

Key events	Data sources
Term 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project launch</li> <li>• Teacher focus meetings (week 6, 8 &amp; 10)</li> <li>• Homework activities-rubrics</li> <li>• Form parent focus group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinator’s field notes</li> <li>• Parent feedback on homework rubrics for school assemblies</li> </ul>
Term 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent and teacher focus group meetings (week 2, 4, 6 &amp; 8)</li> <li>• Fantasy Machines (6<sup>th</sup> May)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinator’s field notes</li> <li>• Parent feedback Fantasy Machines</li> <li>• Interim WA report to VASP manager</li> </ul>
Term 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent and teacher focus group meetings (week 2, 4, 6, 8 &amp; 10)</li> <li>• Home-Grown Heroes (28<sup>th</sup> August)</li> <li>• Most Significant Change Stories MSCS (18<sup>th</sup> September)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinator’s field notes</li> <li>• Parent feedback Home-Grown Heroes</li> <li>• MSCS WA transcripts</li> <li>• Final summative WA report to VASP manager</li> </ul>

**Table 1 Timeline of key events and data sources**

## Research Design

The school principals agreed that all staff meet on the first day of the new school year to launch the WA project and enlist teachers. More teachers volunteered than could be funded, so in consultation with principals, the criteria for selection were those teachers who already focused on values with their students. The distribution of teachers (n= 8) from the three schools, students (n= 195) and the range of year levels (1-6) are indicated next.

School 1 (lead school)- coordinator and two teachers, 69 students-Year 1, 2 & 4

School 2- three teachers, 70 students- Year 1/2, 2/3, & 4/5

School 3- two teachers, 56 students- Year 5/6.

The design combined an action research process with a qualitative methodology to systematise data collection for the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Punch & Oancea, 2014). Teachers are familiar with the cyclical ‘plan, act, observe and reflect’ to design lessons. When research activities can be incorporated into regular classroom programs, it is less intrusive for students but also more effective for teachers’ time management (Kemmis, 2006; Patton, 2015). The qualitative methodology emphasises understanding the participants’ perspectives without predetermining outcomes and generating rich, detailed, contextualised data from the activities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009; Yin, 2016). When teachers are researchers, it is essential to acknowledge that teachers are situated with their values and assumptions as part of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Teachers are in a privileged position of power and have a legal duty of care towards their students. They have access to confidential data and a responsibility to be transparent about the research methodology. Using pseudonyms ensured parent and student anonymity.

One hundred per cent of informed consent from teachers, students and their parents indicated a high level of interest in the project. Once the project gained momentum, the issue of ethics approval was addressed for additional teachers, students and their parents not directly involved in the project who wanted to participate in the practical values activities in terms 2 and 3. They agreed to sign consent forms before involvement so videotape data could be included in data collection for VASP and the WA project. Data were collected for local and national purposes, to meet the broader aims of the VASP project but also to assess progress at a local level. The timeline for how data were collected for both VASP, and the WA project are delineated in table 2.

Timeline	Data sources
Term 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VASP 1<sup>st</sup> National briefing, video (December 2008)</li> </ul>
Term 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WA project launch, video (January 2009)</li> <li>• WA teacher and parent focus meetings- field notes</li> <li>• WA Homework activities e.g. School Assemblies</li> </ul>
Term 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VASP 2<sup>nd</sup> National briefing, video</li> <li>• 1<sup>st</sup> VASP online survey for teachers and parents</li> <li>• WA 1<sup>st</sup> event Fantasy Machines, video</li> <li>• WA Teacher and parent focus meetings- field notes</li> <li>• Interim WA cluster report to VASP managers</li> </ul>
Term 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WA Teacher and parent focus meetings- field notes</li> <li>• WA Preparatory lessons (week 1-5)</li> <li>• WA 2<sup>nd</sup> event Home-Grown Heroes, video (week 6)</li> <li>• VASP facilitator conducts WA MSCS, video (week 8)</li> <li>• WA Final report to VASP managers (week 10)</li> <li>• Final VASP online survey for teachers and parents</li> <li>• VASP 3<sup>rd</sup> National briefing to evaluate VASP, video</li> </ul>

**Table 2 Timeline and data sources for VASP and WA project**

VASP data were collected from three briefings for cluster coordinators with the VASP managers, filmed at the project’s beginning, middle and end. Two online surveys were conducted at the beginning and conclusion of the project for parents and teachers, and stories were generated using the qualitative strategy of ‘The Most Significant Change’ MSC. These data were analysed for VASP and the WA project and included in the interim and final reports.

Davies & Dart (2005) developed the MSC stories technique to allow research participants to decide on the changes they thought were most significant because of the WA project. The VASP manager conducted the MSC strategy and recorded the stories at each

lead school in September (2009), so there was consistency in the approach. All cluster coordinators and a smaller group of students and parents were funded to attend the final VASP summit in Melbourne. The cluster groups were mixed to reread the selected stories and narrow down the final stories that best characterised the VASP outcomes. The data from MSC stories and analyses of the surveys were collated for the national final VASP report, 'Giving Voice to the Impacts of Values Education' (DEEWR, 2010).

The VASP objective was gauged during the National briefings at the project's start, middle and conclusion, where coordinators reported and reflected on their research. This process generated and shared rich qualitative data triangulated with surveys and the MSC stories conducted across all clusters. The surveys, pre- and post-values events, and the original MSC stories were valid data highlighting shifts in perspectives for WA parents and teachers. The findings from the homework activities, two community events and the final MSC stories with additional data drawn from the coordinator's field notes and the WA cluster report submitted to VASP are discussed next.

## **WA Project Activities and Discussion**

### **Term 1- Homework Activities**

One of the issues for the project coordinator was finding common ground with teachers across three schools before designing values activities to involve parents and students. Teachers currently use a variety of commercial programs such as 'You Can Do It!' (Bernard, 1996), 'Bounce Back' (McGrath & Nobel, 2003) and Tribes (Gibbs, 2001, 2006) to teach values explicitly and meet students' social and emotional needs. These programs, while valuable resources, were not specific enough to meet the two objectives of the WA project. However, teachers agreed that two values, mutual respect, and attentive listening, were inherent in classroom behaviour management policies. These values could be applied to school assemblies and involve parents in values discussions. Each teacher was responsible for a class performance during the year, so the opportunity to create a rubric for being a performer or audience member was feasible.

The strength of using the rubric process is that students could identify the concrete behaviours for each criterion and develop a shared understanding of the required behaviours that needed improvement to reach the ultimate goal. The three columns represent the students' ideas as they perceive the situation. Students' language is used on the rubric, making the content accessible. The teacher's role is to guide the discussion, so the students focus on positive choices. However, it is vital to acknowledge the behaviours students perceive as essential to change, even negative ones. Creating a rubric is a process of self-discovery to achieve socially acceptable behaviour as a performer and audience member.

The coordinator completed the exemplars in Tables 3 and 4 with Year 2 students, which teachers adapted to meet their students' needs. In the first two columns (seldom and usually), the undesirable behaviours are often listed because that is what needs to change to reach the ideal behaviour (consistently) in the last column.

Behaviour	Seldom	Usually	Consistently
Participation during rehearsals	Poor choices with behaviour so do not learn part	Watching peers to keep up with rehearsal	Knows words and actions
Eye contact for performance	Little or no eye contact	Inconsistent eye contact	Gives eye contact to audience
Actions/words for performance	Makes faces at the audience/ does not perform	Knows most of the performance	Knows all the performance
Use of props	Fiddles with props most of the time	Occasionally fiddles with props	Appropriate use of props

**Table 3 Mutual respect- performer**

Behaviour	Seldom	Usually	Consistently
Talking	Talks to peers throughout assembly	After reminder from teacher stops talking	Whole body listening throughout assembly
Turning around	Distracting peers with eye contact and facial expressions	After reminder from teacher faces performers	Faces performers throughout assembly
Fiddling with toys and clothes	Brings toys to play with during assembly Fiddles with clothes	After reminder from teacher brings focus back to assembly	Focused on performers throughout assembly

**Table 4 Mutual respect- audience member**

In addition to discussing the rubric with their children, parents were asked to think of other contexts outside the school where the value of mutual respect is relevant. The written responses from parents included attending sporting events such as football and cricket matches, church services, theatre, concerts, movies, and the circus (Appendix 2, mutual respect, WA report final report). Similar data were generated across the schools during terms 1 and 2 for other rubrics for ‘being a friend’ and ‘great group work’ also written up as charts. These charts became resources for parents to read in the classroom, demonstrating how teachers reinforced prosocial values, friendships, and group work. The following extract indicates that parents made stronger links between home and school values.

*Using manners, telling the truth, looking after each other, sharing toys, taking responsibility to do jobs, and following home routines to clean up after a meal and brush teeth before bed, and at school giving parent notes to teachers, changing reading books, returning library books on time... (Appendix 7, links home/school values, WA final report)*

After reviewing the positive feedback from the rubric homework, teachers remarked that they were pleasantly surprised and felt more confident about collaborating with parents. The feedback reflected that students were more informed and enthusiastic about their values homework. As they developed a shared language to talk to their parents about school activities, their interest in values increased. They made concrete connections with the values underpinning their behaviour (Coordinator’s field notes, 11th August 2009), as evidenced in the following parent feedback.

*My son has enjoyed explaining what he has done at school, and we are impressed with what he understands. (Parent feedback, 12.3.09)*

*Our daughter takes great pride in the fact that the values promoted at home are also the school's way. We are on the same page. (Parent feedback, 12.3.09)*

Many parents reiterated these comments as partnerships developed between home and school in terms 2 and 3. Constructing rubrics and using students' ideas and their language made the outcome more accessible. Parents became increasingly invested in the project, and attendance at parent meetings grew. The success of these activities in generating common values language met the project's first aim. It established the groundwork to achieve the next aim, for teachers and parents to work together to develop the community values activities.

### **Term 2- Fantasy Machines**

Values such as mutual respect and attentive listening are inherent in effective group work. They could demonstrate to parents that values education is fundamental to good schooling (aim 2). Teachers agreed that students need to be taught skills to work in groups, such as taking turns and sharing the talk. In the discussions, teachers used the terms cooperative and collaborative learning interchangeably. Both approaches refer to the social aspect of learning and teamwork. Cooperative learning is a more structured approach where the teacher assigns roles for students to achieve a group goal (Gillies, 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 2003, 2018; Johnson et al., 2008). It was agreed to use a less formal approach for the values event to allow students to collaborate with peers and demonstrate to parents how values are enacted during group work (Ashman & Gillies, 2003; Brady, 2006, 2011; Hart, 2000).

In preparation for the event, teachers organised small groups of up to six students from across the year levels to work on the open-ended task of creating a fantasy machine that involved all group members in the actions and reflected what the machine could do. Mixing age groups allowed parents to observe additional values related to how older students looked after and included the younger students. The observational checklist for parents included two questions drawn from classroom charts students made with their teachers for great group work.

What will you see?

- Listening to each other's ideas
- Getting along with each other
- Helping each other
- Working together and sharing.

What will you hear?

- That's a good idea!
- Why don't you try this?
- I know you can do it!
- Good job!

After the activity, parents watched the replay of the recording of the fantasy machines. There was consensus that the children were having much fun. However, parents also noticed the challenges when assessing group work because some students did not cooperate or lacked the confidence to participate. The following four parent observations are extracts from data collected on the day, reaffirming the importance of explicitly teaching values for group work to be successful.

1. This event has given me the opportunity to understand the work teachers do to remind children to learn to listen to each other and take turns. I like the charts in the room about great group work. This really helps the kids.
2. I enjoyed looking at how much fun they were having but could see some children had more confidence than others. The older students were making sure that the little ones understood what to do and were included. They were caring.
3. The groups were all amazing and so different with the machines they produced. I can see how group work helps to achieve better results because more children are contributing ideas. I liked how they took turns to share their ideas.
4. Learning how to work with each other is an important life skill that I am glad my child is learning at school too! (Parent observations, Fantasy machines, term 2, 2009)

Parents appreciated teacher’s efforts to build students’ skills and confidence to work together, and teachers realised the potential of involving parents in authentic situations to develop shared understandings and were excited about the next event.

### Term 3- Home-Grown Heroes

After the success of previous events, teachers decided to develop a series of lessons using graphic organisers such as ‘KWL’ and ‘Y’ charts to encourage the sharing of ideas and deepen students’ understanding of the agreed topic of home-grown heroes. The headings for the KWL chart ‘what I think I know, what I want to know, what I have learnt’ were completed before and after watching the Valiant video. The computer-animated comedy is about a group of war pigeons who helped soldiers by carrying important messages across enemy lines. The three columns on the ‘Y chart’ are the combined ideas generated by the students that link the actions (looks like), words (sounds like) and emotions (feels like) of heroes in Table 5.

Looks like (behaviour)	Sounds like (words)	Feels like (emotions)
• Confident- just do it!	• Encouraging words	• Brave
• Strong	• Make it back in one piece	• Confident
• Showing bravery	• Buggy!	• Proud
• Looking scared in the beginning	• You can do this!	• Responsible
• Courageous	• Brave words	• I can achieve anything
• Warrior	• Ready to die sir!	• Respected
• Trusting each other on their mission	• Mum, I have to do this!	• Appreciated
• Small bird in size but still successful	• I can’t leave without you!	• Scared of failure but having a go anyway
	• Duty calls!	• Commitment
	• I have to do it!	

**Table 5 Y chart- Heroes**

The purpose of these charts was to broaden students’ thinking about abstract terms such as heroism and develop appropriate vocabulary to express the characteristics of a hero. Core values such as being ‘brave, courageous, trusting, respectful and responsible’ were discussed from the Y chart which was displayed for future reference in the classrooms.

During weeks 3 and 4, students used a ‘placemat’ activity. Each student wrote his or her ideas on a corner of the page and shared them with the group to reach a consensus written in the centre of the page. Students chose five core values, ‘kind, caring, honest, helpful and friendly,’ written onto a Venn diagram for the next homework activity to discuss with



parents. Parents completed a similar diagram, which was returned to school to be used for the parent event in week 6.

During week 5 students wrote about the core values of their hero and reasons for choosing their family member. These values were also written around the face of the picture of their hero which they drew. All students wrote a personal invitation letter to their family ‘hero’ (mum, dad or a relative) inviting them to attend the event and enjoy afternoon tea at school. After joint class discussions students agreed on the parent checklist in table 6 for the heroes’ event (Appendix 9, final WA report).

Value	Observed behaviour	Yes	No	Comments
Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening to others with respect</li> <li>• Asking appropriate questions</li> <li>• Being ready for your presentation</li> </ul>			
Kindness/care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saying encouraging comments</li> <li>• Caring for others who are shy or less confident</li> <li>• Looking after family guests</li> </ul>			
Helpfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking if there is anything you need</li> <li>• Showing initiative</li> </ul>			
Friendliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoying the activity-smiling</li> <li>• Participating</li> </ul>			
Honesty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being sincere</li> </ul>			

**Table 6 Parent checklist ‘Home-Grown Heroes’**

For the event in week 6, parents and students were seated in small groupings of up to four families to share their hero stories with a family representative. Parents shared the reason for their choice of hero (homework week 5). Then children presented their personalised drawing and written work which was a lovely surprise for their hero family member. Some parents cried tears of joy when they listened to what their children had written about them. This activity made explicit and concrete abstract values such as appreciation and respect for self and others. Parents stayed in the classroom after the event to discuss their checklists. The following two student extracts (Tim and Rose) from the home-grown hero’s activity are representative of the values most students chose and a parent response (Rose’s mum).

Uncle Tom is honest, nice, brave, friendly, fierce, and strong.(Student Tim)

She [referring to mother] is beautiful, patient, generous, kind, funny, imaginative, precious, fair, caring, loving, spectacular and sweet. (Student Rose)

Thankyou Rose for your kind and thoughtful words. They mean so much to me. It is easy with a daughter as inspiring as you. You are a joy to be with and the best thing that has ever happened to me. Love always, mum xxx (Rose’s Mum)

The final summative qualitative technique is discussed next using the MSC stories which illustrate the changes in values and attitudes for students, teachers, and parents by the end of the project.

### **Term 3 Most Significant Change Stories (MSCS)**

Teachers, parents, and students responded to the question, ‘Looking back over the past months, what do you think was the most significant change due to the WA project?’ with their oral stories, which the VASP manager recorded. The ensuing thought-provoking discussion generated rich qualitative data that could be triangulated with two parent surveys (pre- and post-implementing the values activities) to identify trends fully reported in the final

VASP report (DEEWR, 2010). The evidence in the following three parent extracts for the WA Cluster was clear. Values Education is a shared partnership and responsibility between school and home to articulate and make our values transparent.

*Being involved in this project has allowed me to consolidate my views. I now feel strongly about explicit values education. Previously I thought implicit stuff was enough. I think values driven behaviour becomes instinctive, but I can now see that it is really important to teach children how to articulate values and communicate using a values language. (Parent MSCS, 18.9.2009)*

*Values education is a process/responsibility of both schools and parents and very important for emotional intelligence. Teachers are always teaching values and sometimes unconsciously. They are great life teachers to our children. (Parent, MSCS, 18.9.2009)*

*It's a process that will continue to involve teachers, parents, and children throughout their education. Values education is part of Life Skills Education. It develops our children into mature well-rounded individuals who will be able to survive in society. Values education is particularly important for our children's emotional development. (2nd. Parent survey, 28.8.09)*

Teachers stated they were inspired to be part of a national project and have the autonomy to design research that targeted the needs of their students. Collaborating with like-minded teachers in a team who had diverse teaching experiences contributed to the richness of the discussions and project activities. Teachers became cognisant of how values are deep-seated and identify what really matters and shapes the community.

*I have developed a sense of where I am at with my school and where this sense of community comes from. It comes from talking about things that are really important to each other, and that's about being human, and the parents are as interested in this as what teachers are. And we have found common ground through this project that helped us set the groundwork for where we are going to be going in the future and I'm very excited about that! (Teacher MSCS, 18.9.2009)*

Teachers spoke with great pride with what they had achieved as a group with parents, reaffirmed in this email from the VASP manger after conducting MSC process.

*The MSC session was a most powerful experience. Clearly parents felt that the project had enabled them to be a part of their child's school experience in a different way. Clearly, they think the work you (the school) are doing is most important and needs to keep going ... (VASP manger, email, 18.9.2009)*

Students were deeply affected when they understood what mutual respect, tolerance, care, and compassion were and how they “become embedded in actions and reflection” (DEEWR, 2010, p. 109). Parents conveyed that the values activities engaged their children to discuss values at home because abstract concepts were made concrete and more straightforward as evidenced in this parent's story.

*When I think about the journey ... the project has given us a more concrete tool ... to discuss around the dinner table what values are, what it is to be a kind and respectful member of our family and our community. And the major moment for me was watching my son ... during the heroes' project, ... it was concrete for him ... it really was a light bulb switching on for him. Which in turn made it very rewarding for me. (Parent MSCS, 18.9.2009)*

## Discussion

At the time of the WA project, teachers reported (biannually) to parents. They decided on the frequency (seldom, usually, and consistently) of seventeen descriptors, encompassing students' general attitude, behaviour, and effort at school. At the first focus group meeting, teachers agreed that this process was subjective and that creating rubrics to assess values would be more informative. Parents and students were familiar with teachers using rubrics for academic assessment but not to examine values, so this was a novel approach.

Teachers were working on values activities that were meaningful to them in the context of improving their classroom environments for students. The action research process assisted teachers in making the project activities sustainable, in partnership with parents, and infusing Values Education into their current learning programs (DEEWR, 2010). The teachers reported how inspired they were being part of a national project where their ideas were valued and shared outside their schools. They felt appreciated and professionally validated by their parents, which is argued improved their morale and motivation to contribute to the team and ensure the project's ultimate success (Morcom & MacCallum, 2009).

The project teachers actively created a 'values' focussed child-centred classroom and enthusiastically adapted the project activities to their school environments. Parents expressed a deeper understanding of how their children enacted values in everyday activities, working in pairs and small groups at school, and the broader implications for their children's development and learning.

Parents shifted their perspectives and spoke of the challenges of continuing after the project "... to facilitate that cooperation and that commonality in terms of values language..." (DEEWR, 2010, p. 33). During the project, teachers were highly motivated by the increased involvement of students, teachers, and parents in the final community events. After the project funding ended, the scene was set to refine school policies. Each school negotiated with their communities what their core values were and created commercially published charts to display in the office and around the school as a common focus during school assemblies and gatherings. Teachers created charts with students, written in students' words that were displayed and referred to during lessons. This approach developed a "sustainable basis for teaching that has both philosophical integrity and practical application" (Lovat et al., 2011, p. 31) to infuse values of Education into the curriculum and daily routines.

The significance of the current research was the positive outcomes for teachers and parents in partnership, to agree that teaching values explicitly was a valuable endeavour and a necessary part of a teacher's role. Children learn right from wrong, which are universal principles, by reflecting on how their behaviour affects others and learning how to make better choices (Morcom, 2015; Morcom & Cumming-Potvin, 2010). This project demonstrates that finding common ground and involving the community is worthwhile process. The activities are exemplars for other teachers to use and work with their school communities to develop a partnership approach to create child-centred inclusive classrooms. When children experience meeting their social and emotional needs, they develop confidence and the capacity to work in groups, which are essential life skills. They also learned how to be critical and reflective thinkers about values and improve their relationships, lives and learning by making better choices (Weissberg, 2019; Zins & Elias, 2007).

## Conclusion

The VASP funding was a unique opportunity nationally “in developing explicit, informed, systematic and effective approaches to Values Education in all areas of school policy and classroom practice” across all sectors of Australian schooling (DEEWR, 2010, p. 1) but also at local levels. Each project addressed local issues to improve learning across primary and secondary schools and juvenile detention centres to address students’ diverse social and emotional needs (DEEWR, 2010). The evidence from these projects, focusing on values-based Education, is particularly relevant in global teacher shortages and the increase in the movement of people to different countries with different cultures and values. Internationally, Australia, the USA and the UK are at the forefront of values research, which has increased worldwide in the last ten years. Australian universities are among “the top five co-cited institutions” globally (Wu & Zhao, 2019, p. 269).

Governments are grappling with how to stop the exit of experienced teachers and retain new graduates who leave within five years mainly due to stress, disillusionment with the profession and feeling unappreciated (Schmidt & deCourcy, 2022; State School Teachers Union of Western Australia [SSTUWA], 2023; Tirri, 2011). In particular, public schools carry the main burden of teaching students with special needs, disabilities, and students who have behavioural and emotional issues (Diliberti et al., 2021; SSTUWA, 2023; Tirri, 2021). The challenge for schools is addressing the academic curriculum and negotiating social norms that accommodate the diverse values in their communities (Husu & Tirri, 2007). This challenge is a longstanding problem, even before the COVID pandemic, which started in 2019 and disrupted students’ Education (Diliberti et al., 2021). Teachers urgently need support to lift morale and keep them in the profession.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss at length how certain groups of students can be marginalised due to the worldwide trend of people movement, which is creating diverse student populations in classrooms. However, values education can offer resources “to create safe, orderly, and effective learning environments where students can acquire social as well as academic skills that will allow them to succeed in school and beyond” (Tirri, 2011, p. 159). Like many countries, Finland has been coping with increased migration, resulting in more diverse student populations, and reaffirming the benefits of a holistic approach to supporting individual needs (Husu & Tirri, 2007).

Values Education is at the heart of engaged school communities because it supports students’ social, emotional, and academic needs (Bernard, 2006; Lovat, 2019; Tirri, 2011). Teachers develop students’ critical thinking skills with cooperative strategies such as placemats for brainstorming, KWL and Y charts, and rubrics. Students learn to clarify their values and improve their behaviour, so the classroom ambience is calm and more conducive to effective learning (Lovat, 2019). Students experience a sense of wellbeing within diverse settings (Lovat et al., 2010). Implicitly students learn the unwritten social rules in the hidden curriculum and formulate their beliefs about their place in society. So, it is imperative that all teachers are supported to develop classrooms that have healthy social norms where all students experience a sense of belonging as their human right (Pearce & Cumming-Potvin, 2017; Rahman, 2013; Sari & Doganay, 2009). More research is needed to understand the social and cultural biases that may preclude students who experience disconnection from school to unravel the complexities of the hidden curriculum in contemporary classrooms (Brady, 2011; Rahman, 2013) so all students “reach their potential and achieve their highest educational outcomes” (DESE, 2021, p. 17).



- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2003). Student motivation in cooperative groups: Social interdependence theory. In R. Gillies and A. Ashman (Eds.), *Co-operative learning: The social and intellectual outcomes of learning in groups*, pp.136-176. Routledge Falmer. Student motivation in co-operative groups: Social interdependence theory. (apa.org)
- Johnson, D. W. & Johnson, R. T. (2018). Cooperative learning: The foundation for active learning. In S. M. Brito (Ed), *Active learning: Beyond the future*. Intech Open. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.81086>
- Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Holubec, E. (2008). *Cooperation in the Classroom* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). Interaction Book Company.
- Kemmis, S. (2006). Participatory action research and the public sphere. *Educational Action Research*, 14(4), 459-476. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650790600975593>
- Lovat, T. (2019). Features of the learning ambience created by values pedagogy: Calmness, positive relationships and safety and security. *The Art and Heart of Good Teaching*. Springer Briefs in Education, Pp. 33-46. Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-32-9054-9\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-32-9054-9_4)
- Lovat, T., Dally, K., Clement, N., & Toomey, R. (2011). Values pedagogy and teacher education: Re-conceiving the foundations. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(7), 59-72. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2011v36n7.3>
- Lovat, T., & Toomey, R. (Eds). (2007). *Values education and quality teaching: The double helix effect*. David Barlow.
- Lovat, T., Toomey R., & Clement, N. (Eds.). (2010). *International research handbook on education and student wellbeing*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-8675-4>
- McGrath, H., & Noble, T. (2003). *Bounce back! A classroom resiliency program: Teacher's handbook*. Pearson Longman Bounce back! : a classroom resiliency program teacher's handbook / Helen McGrath and Toni Noble | National Library of Australia (nla.gov.au)
- Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA]. (2008). *Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians*. [www.mceetya.edu.au/mceecdy/melbourne\\_declaration,25979.html](http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceecdy/melbourne_declaration,25979.html)
- Morcom, V. (2005). *Mediating classroom culture based on democratic values: An exploration of a teacher's facilitative role*. [MEd thesis, Murdoch University]. <https://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/id/eprint/207/>
- Morcom, V. (2012). *Motivation as negotiated participation in a collaborative classroom: A sociocultural perspective*. [Doctoral dissertation, Murdoch University]. <http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/14780/>
- Morcom, V. (2014). Scaffolding social and emotional learning in an elementary classroom community: A sociocultural perspective. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 67, 18-29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2014.04.002>
- Morcom, V. (2015). Scaffolding social and emotional learning within 'shared affective spaces' to reduce bullying: A sociocultural perspective. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 6, 77-86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2015.04.002>
- Morcom, V. (2016). Scaffolding peer collaboration through values education: Social and reflective practices from a primary classroom. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 41(1). <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2016v41n1.5>
- Morcom, V., & Cumming-Potvin, W. (2010). Bullies and victims in a primary classroom: Scaffolding a collaborative community of practice. *Issues in Educational Research*, 20(2), 166-182. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier20/morcom.html>

- Morcom, V., & MacCallum, J. (2009). 'Motivation in action' in a collaborative Primary classroom: Developing and sustaining teacher motivation. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(6), 23-40. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2009v34n6.2>
- Morcom, V., & MacCallum, J. A. (2022). Mentoring experienced teachers to change their practice: A sociocultural perspective for professional learning and development. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 34, article 100627. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2022.100627>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. (4th ed.). Sage Publishing. <https://au.sagepub.com/engb/oce/qualitative-research-evaluation-methods/book232962>
- Pearce, J., & Cumming-Potvin, W. (2017). English Classrooms and curricular justice for the recognition of LGBT individuals: What can teachers do? *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(9). <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2017v42n9.5>
- Punch, K. F., & Oancea, A. E. (2014) (2nd ed.). *Introduction to Research Methods in Education*. Sage Publications. <https://www.perlego.com/book/3271727/introduction-to-research-methods-in-education-pdf>
- Rahman, K. (2013). Belonging and learning to belong in school: the implications of the hidden curriculum for Indigenous students. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics shortage of teachers*. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/publication/shortage-of-teachers/> <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2013.728362>
- Sari, M., & Doganay, A. (2009). Hidden curriculum on gaining the value of respect for human dignity: A qualitative study of two elementary schools in Adana. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 9(2), 925-940.
- Schmidt, J., & deCourcy, K. (2022). The pandemic has exacerbated a long-standing national shortage of teachers. *Economic Policy Institute*. <https://www.epi.org/publication/shortage-of-teachers/>
- State School Teachers Union of Western Australia [SSTUWA]. (2023). *Facing the facts- review into public education in Western Australia- final report October 2023*. <https://www.sstuwa.org.au/campaigns-home/review>
- Tirri, K. (2011). Holistic school pedagogy and values: Finnish teachers' and students' perspectives. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 50, 159-165 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2011.07.010>.
- Weissberg, R. P. (2019). Promoting the social and emotional learning of millions of schools children. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 14(1), 65-69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691618817756>
- Wiersma, W., & Jurs, S. G. (2009). *Research methods in education* (9th ed.). Pearson International Edition. <https://www.pearson.ch/HigherEducation/Pearson/EAN/9780205581924/ResearchMethods-in-Education>
- Wu, S., & Zhao, X. (2019). The overall status of international values education research in the recent ten years. *Education Journal*, 8(6), 266-273. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.edu.20190806.15>
- Yin, R. K. (2016). *Qualitative research from start to finish* (2nd ed.). The Guildford Press. <https://www.routledge.com/Qualitative-Research-from-Start-to-Finish/Yin/p/book/9781462517978>

Zins, J. E. & Elias, M. J. (2007). Social and emotional learning: Promoting the development of all students. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 17(2-3), 233-255. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10474410701413152>