

**Evidence of the impact of Values Education,
based on the research of the University of Newcastle, Australia (2009)**

By Dr Neil Hawkes

When I was interviewed by national ABC in Australia, you will hear that I mentioned the excellent values research conducted at Newcastle University. Often, I am asked if there is any research evidence to support the claims of Living Values Education. I am delighted to inform you that there is a growing body of research evidence that supports our positive claims. In Australia, a number of studies have been conducted that show the positive effects of values education on school relationships, ambience, student wellbeing and improved academic diligence. Living Values Education is acknowledged as being one of the inspirational forces behind these studies. (Lovat et al., 2009, p.18)" Professor Terry Lovat and his colleagues at Newcastle University, in Australia, have been monitoring and researching the effects of the Australian Government's Values Education Initiative. This year the University published its final report for the Australian Government, which looks at the evidence concerning the impact of introducing and developing Values Education in schools (Lovat,2009).

The research describes how values-based schools give increasing curriculum and teaching emphasis to Values Education. As a consequence students become more academically diligent, the school assumes a calmer, more peaceful ambience, better student-teacher relationships are forged, student and teacher wellbeing improves and parents are more engaged with the school – all claims made by Living Values too!

Explicit teaching of values provides a common ethical language for talking about interpersonal behaviour. It also provides a mechanism for self-regulated behaviour. An important outcome is a more settled school which enhances quality teaching and enables teachers to raise expectations for student performance.

The effective implementation of Values Education was characterized by a number of common elements.

- Values Education was regarded as a school's "core business", given equal status with other areas and embedded in policies and student welfare practices;
- A 'common language' was developed among staff, students and families to describe values and the school's expectations of student behaviour;
- Staff endeavoured to 'model' and demonstrate the values in everyday interactions with students;
- Values were scaffolded by supportive school-wide practices including teacher facilitation of student reflection and self-regulation of behaviour;
- Values were taught in an explicit way in and out of the classroom and through other media (e.g. assemblies, sport and cooperative games, drama, songs etc.);
- Values education was allied to 'real world learning' involving deep personal learning and imbued both planned and unplanned learning opportunities;
- Values education was reinforced through positive visual media as well as consistent,

- verbal encouragement and acknowledgement;
- Values education was allied to expressed high standards for overall participation, performance and achievement; and
 - Values education was optimally introduced under the guidance of the principal and/or a team of committed staff.

The research also revealed that Values Education had an impact in the following areas:

a. Student *academic diligence* was enhanced. Students:

- showed increased attentiveness in class and a greater capacity to work independently;
- assumed more responsibility for their own learning;
- asked questions and worked together more cooperatively;
- took greater care and effort in their schoolwork;
- took more pride in their efforts.

b. The improvements in *School ambience* included:

- conflict among students decreased or was managed more constructively;
- students demonstrated greater empathy, honesty and integrity;
- more tolerant and cooperative student interactions;
- safer and more harmonious classrooms and playgrounds;
- greater kindness and tolerance among students;
- students actively seeking to include peers without friends;
- students taking greater responsibility with school equipment and routine tasks;
- students treating the school buildings and grounds 'with respect'.

c) The impact on *student-teacher relationships* was evidenced by:

- "more trusting" relationships between staff and students;
- the establishment of more 'democratic' classrooms;
- teachers giving students more 'power' by allowing them choices in learning activities;
- teachers being more conscious of scaffolding students to manage their own behaviour or resolve conflict with others;
- teachers seeking opportunities to acknowledge and reinforce appropriate behaviour;
- teachers 'listening' to students and responding to their concerns and opinions;
- students perceiving that teachers treat them fairly;
- students behaving "more respectfully" towards teachers;
- students showing greater politeness and courtesy to teachers.

d) The positive impacts on *student and teacher wellbeing* included:

- students feeling a greater sense of connectedness and belonging;

- students gaining a greater capacity for self-reflection and self-appraisal;
- students developing a greater capacity for regulating their own and their peers' behaviour;
- teachers receiving collegial support and strong leadership;
- teachers obtaining confidence and knowledge through opportunities for professional development and through staff collaboration;
- teachers re-examining their practices and role;
- the fostering of relational trust among staff and between teachers and families.

Other research evidence:

When Values Education was explicit, a common language was established among students, staff and families. This not only led to greater understanding of the targeted values but also provided a positive focus for redirecting children's inappropriate behaviour. Teachers perceived that explicitly teaching values and developing empathy in students resulted in more responsible, focused and cooperative classrooms and equipped students to strive for better learning and social outcomes. When values are explicitly endorsed, acknowledged and 'valued' within a school culture, it becomes incumbent on schools to ensure that staff, as well as students are both benefactors and recipients in respectful and caring interactions. The common focus draws teachers together to create a collaborative and cohesive school community which supports teachers to do their job more effectively. This has important ramifications for students' academic progress and wellbeing.

Many thanks to Newcastle University's research program which has produced such excellent evidence on the impact of Values Education. I invite you to share it with others so that we can further encourage the development of Living Values Education.

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Reference

Lovat, T., Toomey, R., Dally, K. & Clement, N. (2009). Project to test and measure the impact of values education on student effects and school ambience. Final Report for the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) by The University of Newcastle. Canberra: DEEWR. Available at: [http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/Project to Test and Measure the Impact of Values Education.pdf](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/Project_to_Test_and_Measure_the_Impact_of_Values_Education.pdf)

